

THE  
INDEPENDENT  
ARAB

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# THE INDEPENDENT ARAB

By  
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THE MIDDLE EAST

IRAQ (MESOPOTAMIA)

SYRIA AND ARABIA PETRÆA

*At end of  
Volume*

## PREFACE

THE past ten years have seen the establishment, in Iraq, of a new relation between East and West. A naturally independent people, with a glorious tradition in the past, has been given an unusually short time in which to remember, after four hundred years of subjection to alien rule, that independence is of no value without discipline and good administration. If this lesson has indeed been learnt, as I believe and hope it has, the main credit is due on the one hand to His Majesty King Feisal and the Iraqis themselves, and on the other to the British officers, headed by Sir Percy Cox, who have worked with them since the experiment began. But success could never have been achieved if it had not been for the earlier work of two men, one of whom, caring little for good administration, sowed in Arabia Petræa the seeds of Arab independence, while the other, caring little for Arab independence, laid in Mesopotamia the foundations of discipline and good administration.

Each of these men has published his own account of the events in which he took so prominent a part, and my only excuse for entering the field is that I served with them both during the war, and shared later in the events in London which led up to the Iraq Treaty of 1922, when the policy was finally adopted which culminated in the admission of Iraq to membership of the League of Nations as a fully independent Sovereign State. This book is a

record of my own experiences, and lays no claim to be a history of the policy of His Majesty's Government in the Middle East, but in the later chapters I have described certain aspects of that policy at some length, not with the object of criticising or blaming any of the authorities who were trying, each in his own way, to come to right conclusions in those difficult times, but in the endeavour to give a fair picture of the problems that presented themselves, and of the attempts that were made to solve them.

If I have done less than justice to the opinions held by those who thought differently from myself, or understated the difficulties which would have attended the earlier adoption of what I have always believed to be the right policy, it is not from any desire to justify myself or to throw responsibility upon others. I still think, as I thought then, that the disorders which broke out in Mesopotamia in the summer of 1920 might have been averted, and the course of events in Syria profoundly modified, if the spirit which animated the British officers who fought with the Arabs during the war had in some way been communicated to those who built up the civil administration in Mesopotamia, and if the trumpet of Downing Street had given forth a certain instead of an uncertain sound. All my own energies were directed towards these two objects, and I can only regret now, as I regretted then, that they did not bear fruit in time.

I have to acknowledge the permission given to me by the Foreign Office to refresh my memory of official papers dealt with in 1919 and 1920, and the kindness of the Foreign Office librarian, Mr. Stephen Gaselee, in placing them at my disposal.



I am also indebted for many valuable suggestions to Sir Percy Cox, Sir Arnold Wilson, and Aircraftsman T. E. Shaw, who have kindly read through the proofs, and to the various Departments of His Majesty's Government for their forbearance and expedition in giving their imprimatur to the concluding chapters.

HUBERT YOUNG.

BAGHDAD,  
*November 1932.*



## PROLOGUE

### CHAPTER I

#### JOURNEYS (MIDDLE EAST, 1913)

First interests in Arabs and Arabic. Haji Abdul Majid. Trip to Macedonia and Constantinople. Beyrout. Damascus. Visit to Yahya Beg al Atrash. Lawrence at Carchemish. Diarbekir. Raft-journey down Tigris to Mosul and Baghdad. Steamer to Basrah and Karachi.

ARABIA and the Arabs have interested me ever since I began to try to learn Arabic twenty-five years ago at Aden. I was then a gunner, waiting to transfer to the Indian Army in the hope of eventually being taken into the Indian Political Department. I had been strongly advised by Sir Louis Dane, who was Foreign Secretary to the Government of India when I first went out to India, to study Arabic before taking up Persian or Urdu, both of which are largely based on Arabic, and my posting to Aden in 1907 gave me an opportunity of following his advice. The chief difficulty about Arabic, apart from the pronunciation and the tiresome script, is its wonderful richness and flexibility, but this difficulty has the compensating advantage that practically nothing is untranslatable into Arabic. Professor E. G. Browne used to tell a story to illustrate this. The great Arabist, Palmer, decided to amuse himself one day by translating Lewis Carroll's poem "Jabberwocky" into Arabic, so he carefully put together exact Arabic equivalents to all the portmanteau words and showed the finished poem with an anticipatory

chuckle to his Maulvi. The old gentleman read it through and handed it back with a bow.

"Masha'allah, sir," he said, "it is excellent!" "What do you mean, excellent?" said Palmer. "Do you understand it?" "Understand it?" replied the Maulvi. "Of course I understand it. It is beautiful Arabic, but you have made one mistake. The word *taghamghama*, which you have used for a bird whiffling through a tulgy wood, is more often used for a stone rolling downhill."

I had not been at Aden very long before I was invalided home, and found myself with some months of idleness before me. By great good fortune my friend Denison Ross happened to know of a young Baghdadi named Haji Abdul Majid, who was at a loose end in London, and I managed to prevail upon him to come down to St. Leonards and coach me. The Haji's English was even more rudimentary than my Arabic, which prevented me from wasting any of my time, and by the end of my leave I had made fair progress. In the following year I was again invalided, and again got hold of my friend the Haji, with whom I worked in London for two months. We used to go out together when we were tired of sitting indoors, and one day I took him to the Franco-British Exhibition at the White City. In the Moroccan section there was a Moorish soldier with whom the Haji conversed, and to whom I made a few remarks. A small crowd collected round us and followed us about till we came to the Indian section, where there was an Afghan who spoke many languages. The Haji at once began showing off, and the two discoursed for some time in Arabic, while the crowd grew larger. I was getting nervous by this time, and when they tried to

bring me into the conversation I made a very poor show, which amused the crowd. They then began talking about all the languages they knew, and the Afghan let fall that he spoke French. "French?" said the Haji. "My friend here speaks French like a Frenchman." On this the Afghan said to me in French, "I hear you speak French like a Frenchman." With my head full of Arabic I could only stutter a disclaimer which made the crowd roar with laughter and completed my confusion. I had to hustle the Haji away and take him for three or four trips on the scenic railway, of which he was terrified, before I could make him understand that I did not like being treated as an exhibit.

The Haji was a lovable creature and a born teacher, and it was entirely due to him that I qualified as an Interpreter in Arabic in July 1908. His stories about Baghdad and Arabia made me long to see them for myself, and when I came home five years later on my first long leave from India, I made up my mind to find my way out again across the Middle East. This was a much more formidable undertaking in those days than it is now. Aviation was in its infancy, and I doubt whether an aeroplane had ever been seen at that time in the whole region between the Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf. There were railways in Syria and Palestine, and the Hejaz railway from Damascus to Medina had just been opened, but the Baghdad railway was still little more than a project. So far as I know, no motor-car had ever crossed the desert, and the only forms of transport between Syria and Iraq were those which had been in existence for the last four thousand years. The alternatives I had been told of were to cross the desert by camel

from Damascus to Baghdad, to drive from Aleppo to Meskinah and float for twelve days down the Euphrates, or to drive or ride from Aleppo the whole way to Baghdad along the bank of the Euphrates, which would take from twelve to nineteen days.

I began to make such enquiries as I could in London about these three routes, and while I was still uncertain which way to go, I was suddenly given the chance of going out with my cousin, Hilton Young, and George Trevelyan to the Balkans. We were in Macedonia for just three weeks, from the 2nd to the 23rd June, during which I was chiefly occupied with military matters, as we were the guests of the Servian Army and I was anxious to get an account of their operations against the Turks the year before. We went first by rail to Uskub, which had fallen into the hands of the Servians as a result of their great victory at Kumanovo in the previous October, and then made a tour to Prizren, Jakova, Ipek, and Mitrovitsa, returning to Uskub for another two days. At Jakova I had a chance of talking Arabic to an Arnaut who had served as a trooper in the Turkish Army in the Yemen, and had subsequently taken part as an Albanian irregular in the first resistance offered by the Turks to the Servian invasion of Macedonia. Apart from this chance encounter, my Arabic was of no use to me, but I learnt a good deal about the relations between the Turks and their subject races in Europe. From Uskub we went to Monastir and Salonika and returned by way of Constantinople, where we stopped for three or four days and I was able to get first-hand information about my projected journey.

It appeared that no one could cross the desert by

camel from Damascus without the goodwill of successive Arab sheikhs, with each of whom he must be prepared to leave a gold watch or some equally substantial present. The Ottoman Government did not at all encourage such journeys, and would probably take no responsibility for a traveller's safety. In addition to this, they were inclined to be suspicious of British officers, and I would almost certainly have to pretend to be something else. The river-journey down the Euphrates was not recommended, as there was nothing to see, and to float for eight days through the desert in an open boat with no one to talk to would be intolerably dull. The alternative of riding for nineteen days along the bank seemed rather tame, and I did not want to give up the desert journey without a struggle, so I decided that my best plan would be to go to Damascus in the first place, and look about. If it proved impossible to do the desert journey in time, or if the other difficulties were insuperable, I could always go up to Aleppo and on to Baghdad by one or other of the two alternative routes.

I set out eventually on the 14th August, with three months before me in which to reach Karachi, and arrived at Beyrout ten days later. Here I made myself known to Canon Parfit, the English chaplain, and gladly accepted his kind offer to put me up for a short time at his house in the Lebanon, so that I could rub up my Arabic and make my final plans. I was still uncertain what to do, and welcomed the opportunity of going with him to pay a visit to Yahya Beg al Atrash, the Druze leader, in his home at Aere, ten miles north of Bosra-eski-Sham. We started by train from Aley, on the Beyrout-Damascus railway, and wound slowly up

the steep gradients of the Lebanon, where the carriages tilted so sharply on the curves that the buildings by the way seemed leaning towers. A glimpse of the famous cedars, which grow now only in one small district, was disappointing. Nothing is more noticeable throughout what was once the Ottoman Empire than the absence of forests. Macedonia, Thrace, Syria, Palestine, and Iraq are all for the most part treeless, except for the revenue-bearing date-palm, and became so during the four centuries of Ottoman dominion. The only real forest I saw on the whole of my wanderings from Belgrade to the Persian Gulf was at the monastery at Deçani in Albania, forty miles from the nearest road, where the influence of the Russian Orthodox Church had been too strong for Ottoman neglect and destructiveness. Afforestation is slow and costly, and it will be many years before these regions regain their ancient forests, and the Lebanon its cedars.

Beyond the watershed of the Lebanon the character of the country changed. The seaward slopes, with their terraces, their sandstone houses and their occasional dark cypresses gave way to the wide valley of the Beka'a, once the high-road from Assyria and Babylonia to Egypt. On either side of the line lay acres of prostrate vines. Higher up the slopes were rows of pollard mulberries grown for silk, and far away across the valley rose Hermon, flecked with snow. After Rayaq, the junction for Baalbek and Aleppo, the train crawled along the valley seeking a way through the Anti-Lebanon to Damascus. By its side ran the River Abana, here but a tiny stream, bordered with grass, which led it to a gorge in the bare hills. Down in the gorge poplars and fruit trees grew along the banks to a



width of not more than a hundred yards, and there were times when the stream itself could not be seen even from the railway which hung over it, so deep had it cut its way into the earth. At one point, where it rounded a sharp bend, black holes in the cliff-side marked the entrances to primitive cave-dwellings. As the train neared Damascus, the valley widened and became an orchard of every kind of fruit tree. Through the thickly planted poplars, gleams of yellow and chestnut showed the quince and pomegranate, above the belt of green were rows of vine and mulberry, and high over all towered the rugged cliffs which mark the boundary of the desert.

At the mouth of the gorge, in the centre of a great oasis, lay the city of Damascus, the pearl in the emerald setting, most beautiful of all the cities of Islam, save only Fez and Constantinople. It was a city of running water, every house having its own fountain or spout fed from the chuckling Abana, which ran through the middle of the city and made a refreshing accompaniment to the noise and clatter of the streets. It was easy to see why Damascus had such a name among the dwellers in the desert, and the glimpse I had of it then helped me five years later to realise their longing for it.

At the club we found Devey, the consul, who told us all about the Hauran and advised us to travel by the newly opened branch line from Deraa to Bosra-eski-Sham, of which we had not heard. By great luck we found that the weekly train for Deraa which connected with this branch was leaving "with the sun" next morning, and decided to go by it, partly because we had not much time to spare, but chiefly because we were anxious to slip

away unobserved. We reached Deraa at midday, and were greeted by the local doctor, who had been one of Parfit's pupils and happened to be in the station. He told us that there were no stations yet on the branch line, and that we should find only tents at Bosra. He could give us no idea how to get on to Aere, but luck was with us again, and we found at Bosra the father of another of Parfit's pupils, who had been Yahya Beg's steward for six years. This man at once got hold of one of the sheikh's followers who was going back to Aere that evening, found horses for us to ride, and started us off safely on the last stage of our journey.

Three and a half hours' ride brought us to the sheikh's house, where we were hospitably greeted by Yahya Beg himself, a magnificent old man well over six feet high, with a deep voice and a heavy white moustache. He led us to divans on a dais at the end of a large hall, the sides of which were lined with visitors and retainers squatting on the floor, who rose as we came in, and waited to squat again till we were seated. A solemn silence followed, broken only by the tinkle of pestle and mortar from the far end of the hall, where the coffee-maker was grinding some freshly roasted coffee. When it was ground, he boiled it in an enormous jug with a beaked spout and poured it out through a wisp of fibre into a smaller one. Fresh coffee was then thrown in and the liquid boiled again and strained a second time into a still smaller jug. The process was repeated a third time before he brought it round, clinking against each other as he went four tiny bowls, like egg-cups without bases, which fitted into a nest in the hollow of his left hand. As he came to each guest he poured a few drops of piping-

hot coffee in a thin stream from a great height into the topmost bowl, and held it out, passing on as soon as each was taken until his hand was empty. Then he came back to the first guest and poured him out a second sip, and so on until each of the first four was satisfied. I noticed that Parfit and my host both drank withaloud "schlooping" sound, and did my best to imitate them, but when I had had the three sips which each of them had taken I was unsuccessful in my attempts to show that I had had enough. In spite of every gesture I could think of the man went on helping me, until at last Parfit whispered that I must stick my little finger out if I really wanted him to stop. All other gestures were apparently read as polite protestations which must be disregarded.

Not until the coffee ceremony was over were our tongues loosened, and even then we exchanged a great number of salutations before getting down to business. The Atrash family were the hereditary rulers of the Jebel Druze, that tangle of hills lying to the south-east of Damascus which had always been a thorn in the flesh of the authorities in Syria. The Druzes had the name of being very fond of the English, and were the inveterate enemies of the Catholic Maronites, who were the protégés of the French. The object of Parfit's visit to Yahya Beg was to discuss the possibility of one of his sons being sent to the school at Ain Anub, and this was naturally the first subject of conversation. Later on the talk turned on the general position of the Arab countries, and I had my first lesson in the politics of Arabia.

The first thing that struck me, and made an indelible impression on my mind, was that the

desert, which I had always regarded as a more or less impassable barrier, was on the contrary a sure means of intercourse and communication. Yahya Beg knew everything that was going on in the peninsula of Arabia, and talked freely of the relations between the various Arab princes, Ibn Shaaalan of Jauf, Ibn Rashid of Hail, Ibn Saud of Riadh, and even the Imam of Sanaa in the Yemen. All these potentates were at that time semi-independent, and more concerned with their own rivalries than with rebelling against the shadowy authority of the Ottoman Empire. In Syria, Mesopotamia, and the Hejaz, on the other hand, where the Ottoman yoke was heavier, there was a growing movement towards independence. The sheikh thought that this followed naturally upon the movement of the Young Turks in Turkey itself, which had resulted five years before in the overthrow of the old régime. He talked of the effect upon young Syrians of the propaganda directed towards education and progress. "You have no doubt seen," he said, "the words *Il'al 'ilm—Il'al 'ilm* (to knowledge—to knowledge) painted upon the street corners in Beyrout. These words were originally painted by the Young Turks, but they have had an even stronger effect upon the Young Arabs. There are secret societies——" He paused as if he had said too much, and went on hastily, "The Young Arabs have organisations not only here in Damascus but in Baghdad, Basrah, and the Hejaz, and are in uninterrupted communication with each other across the desert, where camel-riders pass freely in all directions. These two years have seen the Turks driven out of Tripoli by the Italians and out of Macedonia and Thrace by the

Balkan Powers. Would God there were some power to drive them out of the Jebel and all the Arab countries ! ”

I little thought that within four years my fine old host would have been killed by the Turks, and that I should myself be with an Arab column, officered by the Young Arabs of whom he spoke, busily blowing up the railway by which we had just come down from Damascus to Deraa, or that the power which the old sheikh hoped and dreamed of would be the British Empire. I was more interested at the time in what he said about camel-riders, and eagerly enquired whether he could arrange for me to be escorted across the desert to Baghdad. He promised to let me know if an opportunity presented itself, but did not hold out much hope. It was one thing for an Arab to carry a letter undetected from Baghdad to Damascus and quite another for an Englishman to evade the Turkish authorities, who were even more suspicious than I had been told they were in Constantinople. The Europeans who had done the journey could be counted on the fingers of one hand, and they had only succeeded as a result of careful planning and under no restrictions of time. I told him that there were only two months left before the date by which I must reach Baghdad if I was not to be regarded as having overstayed my leave, and he at once advised me to give up the idea and take one of the more regular routes.

While we were talking the servants had been arranging a tremendous meal at one end of the large hall, and we were summoned at this point to take our places. It was my first experience of a meal with Arabs, and I was amused at the business-like

way in which they disposed of the tiresome job of eating. We sat round a cloth spread on the floor, in the middle of which was a huge tinned dish piled high with rice and crowned with the carcase of a whole sheep. All round were smaller bowls and dishes with sour cream, vegetables, eggs fried in sugar, pickles of every kind, and tomato and other sauces with small pieces of meat and potato floating in them. Each diner was given a large flapjack of unleavened bread which served as a rapidly diminishing table napkin. In deference to our Western ideas there were three pewter spoons, with which we might ladle soup or sauce over the nearest rice-slope before picking up a mouthful with the fingers of the right hand. Dipping indiscriminately into every receptacle within reach, we stuffed in silence till we could stuff no more. Each of us then rose without a word, held out his greasy hand to be sluiced from a long-spouted ewer, and retired to a divan for coffee and cigarettes. Our places were immediately taken by diners of lower degree, who in their turn gave way to others until all were fed.

After dinner we talked again interminably, while fresh coffee was roasted and ground at the far end of the hall. At one moment there was a clatter of hoofs, as the sheikh's favourite mare walked in unconcernedly, and drank from a trough set by the wall. I was astonished at the number of people who came in and drank the sheikh's coffee as of right. "Surely he must be a very great sheikh," I said to my neighbour, "to keep such open house." "Yea, by God," he replied, "he is father of fifteen. Ibn Shaalan himself is father of only nineteen." "Father of only nineteen what?" I asked. "Berries of cardamom to flavour the

coffee," he replied. "It is by count of berries that we reckon greatness here." I have never come across this standard of measurement anywhere else, and suppose that it must be peculiar to the Druzes. The expression "father of," meaning "endowed with," or "owner of," is common to all Arabic-speaking peoples, but it sounds comic to the foreigner when he first hears it used.

I spent a restless night on a row of chairs in the middle of the sheikh's guest-chamber, as the pile of mattresses which had been spread for me was too fully tenanted for comfort, and returned to Damascus the following day with Parfit. We were admiring the view of the city from the platform which had been specially built for the Kaiser on his recent visit to Syria and Palestine, when we were greeted by a tall, bearded stranger who turned out to be Dr. Usher, of the American Mission at Van, who was returning to his headquarters. When he heard that I was making for Baghdad, he suggested that we should travel together as far as Diarbekir, where I could get a raft to float me down the Tigris to Mosul. This was quite a new idea, and rather attractive. Diarbekir was at that time almost as inaccessible a place to the ordinary traveller as any in Asia, and Parfit strongly advised me not to miss the chance of being escorted there by a man who spoke Turkish fluently and was so widely known and respected in those wild parts. In the end I thankfully accepted the offer, though I felt that I was departing a little from my original plan, and should see less of the Arabs than I had hoped. On the other hand, I rather welcomed the prospect of seeing Mosul, which I should otherwise have missed, and did not mind how I got across,

now that the desert journey had proved impossible. Had I only known it, this change of plan was to do more to link my fortunes with the future of the Arabs than any desert journey could have done.

Usher was going to spend a week with friends at Aintab, which lay in the hills some sixty miles north of Aleppo. We could go by train from Damascus, changing to the broad-gauge line at Rayaq, and stop for a night at Baalbek and a night at Aleppo *en route*. From Aintab we would cover the two hundred miles to Diarbekir by road through Birejik and Urfa, and if I had time I would go on with Usher to Van and find my way back somehow to the Tigris and Baghdad.

We all left Damascus together next day, and at Rayaq I said good-bye to my kind host, who was going back to Beyrout, and started on the next stage of my journey. When we reached Aleppo, we found that the Baghdad railway was actually in being as far as Jerablus, where a railway-bridge was being built by the German engineers. On the bank of the river just above the bridge was the great mound of Carchemish, where a British expedition was excavating the old Hittite capital. Neither Usher nor I knew that archæologists do not dig in the summer, and we thought it would be fun to combine a visit to the "digs" with a peep at the railway-bridge. So we planned to go by an early train to rail-head at Jerablus, leaving our baggage at a station half-way, spend an hour or two at Carchemish, and come back at midday to pick it up and ride to Aintab, which was thirty miles from the railway-line.

At Carchemish we found that Hogarth and Woolley were away and the "digs" closed down



for the summer, but we were shown over them by a quiet little man of the name of Lawrence, who was for some reason living there alone. We were so much interested in what he showed us that we lost all count of time, and suddenly realised that unless we were very quick we should miss the only train back. Rushing away, we did our best to catch it, but it steamed out of the station before our eyes, leaving us stranded thirty miles away from our belongings.

The Turkish station-master was sympathetic and helpful. He told us that a construction train would be returning to Aleppo in an hour or two, and advised us to ask the German engineer to allow us to go by it as far as the station where we had left our things. Failing this, we might perhaps induce the German to lend us his own motor-trolley for the trip. My experience of the kindness and hospitality shown by Public Works and Railway men in India to stranded travellers made me welcome this suggestion. My only fear was that the pleasure of seeing fellow white men would make the German insist on putting us up for the night, which would have interfered with our plans.

We trudged hopefully across the mile and a half of loose sand which separated the station from the engineers' headquarters, and were shown into the German's office. It was a very hot day and both Usher and I were pretty tired. The German looked us up and down and asked curtly what he could do for us. Rather taken aback, I suggested chairs, which were brought with a surly apology. Then I explained the position and asked if we could have a lift on the construction train. I mentioned casually that our friend Mr. Lawrence had been showing us

over his excavations at the Carchemish mound, which accounted for our having missed the train. Unfortunately Lawrence was anything but *persona grata* with the German engineer, though of course we did not know this, and I could not have made a more unfortunate mistake than to refer to him as our friend. The German expressed his readiness to do what he could to help, but regretted that he was not authorised to allow anyone to ride on a construction train without previous reference to Constantinople. Knowing something of German red-tape, and nothing of the real reason for his refusal, I then suggested the motor-trolley. To his great regret the German was precluded by a similar rule from lending his trolley, but said that he would gladly do anything else in his power to help us. Suppressing with some difficulty the temptation to ask whether Constantinople had to be referred to before he could offer us a drink, we left him and went back to the "digs."

Here a very different reception awaited us, and we found out why we had been treated so scurvily. Lawrence told us that the German engineer suspected him of spying on the Baghdad railway, and causing difficulties with the local labour. He said gleefully that he did not go out of his way to remove this impression. On the contrary, he took a mischievous delight in rousing the German's suspicions and cutting him out in every possible way. He even told us that he had gone so far one day as to drag some large pipes up to the top of the mound, whereupon the German had reported in a frantic telegram, which somehow fell into his hands, that the mad Englishman was mounting guns to command the railway-bridge over the Euphrates.

The natives of Jerablus loved Lawrence. They all thought him mad, but they could not resist his absolute fearlessness, and they did not at all like the German engineers, who did not know how to treat them.

Lawrence was also a great friend of the biggest Kurdish chief in the neighbourhood, one Basrawi, who owned a hair tent with no less than forty poles. Whenever Basrawi went in to Aleppo by train, Lawrence used to make him a present of his ticket, telling him that he was a guest on the line. One day Basrawi turned up at Jerablus station without having seen Lawrence on the way. He found the German engineer going to Aleppo, and got into the same carriage, and when the ticket collector appeared, he referred him to the German with a courteous wave of the hand, as if to say, "There sits my host." The German knew nothing of Basrawi, and rather rudely declined to pay. The consequence was that as soon as Basrawi got back all the Kurdish workmen disappeared from the bridge works, and did not come back until the German had apologised and promised him a free trip to Aleppo whenever he liked.

Lawrence would not hear of our trying to get back any other way, and insisted upon our staying the night. We were only too glad to accept his offer, and bowls of grapes embedded in snow, with coffee out of Hittite cups 3,500 years old, soon made us forget our thirst and disappointment. We spent the afternoon and evening talking about everything under the sun, and just before we went to bed Lawrence suggested that, instead of going back to Aintab next day, we should send for our things and stop with him for a week at Carchemish. Usher

would, I believe, have been quite glad to do this, as he was no less fascinated by this remarkable creature than I was, but he could not disappoint the friends who were expecting him, so we eventually arranged that he should go back alone and send me my baggage, and that I should stay for a week with Lawrence and then ride across to Birejik to join Usher on his way to Diarbekir.

I have seldom enjoyed a week more than that week at Carchemish. We spent the days in clambering over the mound, bathing in the Euphrates, carving figures out of the soft limestone, and above all talking. Lawrence was then twenty-five, though he looked about sixteen, but in many respects he was years older. By his mere personality he had converted the excavation into a miniature British consulate. His rough native workmen would have done anything for him. Slight and fair and clean-shaven, he was the last person whom one would have imagined capable of wandering about in native dress and passing unobserved among the swarthy and bearded inhabitants, but he had mastered the local dialect and was apparently accepted without question wherever he went as a youth from Jerablus. I had one typical experience of his way of asserting his position as the unofficial Qonsolos, or representative of the great British Government. While I was at Jerablus, his young brother came to spend a few days with him, and one day we three went out on the river in a canoe with a small Evinrude motor. Just below the trestle bridge which then carried the construction line across the river, the motor broke down, and we were just preparing to leave the canoe stranded on the shingle and walk home, when we heard two or three

dull explosions in the direction of the German engineers' camp. "Hullo," said Lawrence, "there are some of those blighters dynamiting fish again. We can't have that, can we?" "Oh no!" we said, "we can't have that, of course," not knowing who the blighters were, or why they should not dynamite fish. Wading obediently through the shallows, we dragged the canoe across to the right bank and found three or four large Kurds with a heap of dead and stunned fish at their feet. Lawrence walked straight up to the biggest of them. "What meanest thou by dynamiting fish?" he said. "Thou knowest perfectly well that it is against the Turkish law. In any case it is a shameful thing to do. Now pick up thy fish, tie them in a bundle, and come with me to the police station."

Unfortunately, it turned out that this particular Kurd was not to be bluffed. He looked down on Lawrence quite unmoved and said: "What is this? Who art thou? I know thee not. I know not thy father nor yet thy mother. I gather up no fish. I tie them in no bundle. Moreover, I come not with thee to the police station." "I shall have to take thee there myself, then," said Lawrence, and without a moment's hesitation he seized the big man by the arm and began to march him off. Not to be outdone, his young brother seized the other arm. The remaining Kurds were taken by surprise at first, but soon recovered and began to throw stones, one of which caught Lawrence in the side and nearly broke a rib. Things began to look a little nasty, for none of us had even a stick in his hand, and when one of the Kurds drew his knife and advanced theatrically in my direction, I suggested that we had better chuck it. "All right," gasped

Lawrence, "but I'll damned well have them run in."

We followed him up the bank and through the German camp to the Turkish police post, where we found a typical Turkish police inspector squatting in state on a divan. To the accompaniment of the inevitable coffee and cigarettes Lawrence lodged his complaint, and as soon as the official had promised to take the necessary steps we took our leave. But Lawrence was leaving nothing to chance, and made us hang about round the corner for a quarter of an hour to see if anything happened. As no one appeared, he led us back to the police station, and refusing further coffee and cigarettes he demanded what action was being taken. "Take care, my friend," he said; "you know that I had your predecessor removed for incompetence, and I shall certainly complain of you to headquarters if you neglect your duty." His resolute attitude frightened the easy-going Turk. "I will send gendarmes forthwith," he protested. "What shall I do with the malefactors, effendi?" "I should flog them," said Lawrence calmly. Whether they were really flogged, or even taken into custody, I have no notion. But the incident gives some idea of the way in which this solitary young Englishman, who had no official position whatever, had begun even in peace-time to strike out a line for himself.

Another day we all rode out to visit Basrawi and to see his guest tent. There is very little difference between the lowland Kurd and the nomad Arab, and Basrawi's camp was typical of hundreds that I have seen since in various parts of Arabia. The famous tent with the forty poles was for the most part an open marquee of black hair, but with an

enclosure screened off at one end for the women. The meal to which we were treated was no less lavish, if a little more primitive, than Yahya Beg's, but our host was much more difficult to satisfy. He kept on pressing us to take larger handfuls and was much distressed at our decadent appetites. "Ye eat like birds," he cried, "pecking daintily where ye should swallow heartily. See here!" and he clutched a great handful of the greasy rice, squeezed it into a bolster between fingers and palm, and then shot it dexterously into his mouth endways with an upward flick of the thumb. We made one or two attempts to imitate him, but had to give up and accept our Western inferiority. After coffee we had a display of horsemanship, including the "jerid," in which spears are thrown and caught like javelins, and I had my first sight of Arab ponies in movement in their native wilds. As we rode back we tried to imitate this too, but equally unsuccessfully.

I never quite fathomed why Lawrence was still at Carchemish when the "digs" were closed down, but I gathered that it was partly from choice and partly from economy. He used to spend his time wandering about in Arab dress, sometimes for days at a time, storing his phenomenal memory with scraps of local knowledge which came in very useful later on. When he was not doing this he was trying to puzzle out the Hittite inscriptions or target-shooting with a long Mauser pistol. I amused myself by competing with him at both these games. We used to stick up a matchbox against the bank of one of the excavations and shoot at it from about thirty paces, he with his Mauser and I with my Army Webley, which saw no other service during my trip. He wrote to me afterwards and told me

that when work began again at the "digs" they found just behind our matchbox a fine bas-relief whose edge had been chipped but not damaged by our bullets.

Lawrence was a wonderful shot, and beat me every time in the shooting gallery, but I scored off him once with the Hittite inscriptions. I had been chaffing him for not being able to decipher one of them, and he retorted by suggesting, with the impish smile which I got to know so well five years afterwards, that I had better have a try myself. I looked at the thing for a moment, and noticed that a certain figure which faced to the right in the top line of the inscription faced to the left in the second. A forgotten Greek word leapt to my memory and I said casually, "I see that it is *Boustrophedon*." This really impressed Lawrence, and I am convinced that it was to this rather than to anything else which happened during my stay at Carchemish that I owed my subsequent association with him.

When the week came to an end, Lawrence and I parted with more than the usual expressions of hope that we should meet again, and I rode on with one of his retainers to Birejik, some fifteen miles upstream, where I met Usher. Our mode of conveyance from Birejik to Diarbekir was either a horse carriage shaped like a huge barrel lying on its side, or local ponies, whichever we could get. The journey was quite uneventful, except for a short stay at Urfa with Gracey of the American Mission there. I shall always remember his thoughtfulness in riding out to meet us with two of his ponies for us to ride, and the immense relief their easy paces were to us, after a tiring day on the roughest of Kurdish pack-ponies. At Diarbekir



we stayed with Hirst, the Consul, who advised me not to try to go on to Van, as I should not be able to get back to the Tigris except by coming back to Diarbekir. Time did not admit of this, so I had to bid farewell to Usher and make up my mind to go straight to Mosul.

I found that it was possible to do my next stage in the greatest comfort, not to say luxury. Hirst told me that there would be nothing easier than to have a small hut built on one of the skin-rafts which have been used between Diarbekir and Mosul ever since the days of Herodotus, and probably for centuries before then. The raft itself consisted of a framework of poplar poles lashed four-square like a chess-board, and resting upon a layer of inflated goatskins. These were for the most part hidden by bales of merchandise, except across the centre, where there were two huge oars, with latticed blades, and beneath these you could see the skins' plump and glistening backs. In the centre of the after part of the raft a space would be cleared for a deck of planks, just large enough to form the floor of a tiny hut, seven feet long by six feet across, inside which I should be able to set up my camp-bed and keep my belongings.

It took two days to build the hut, during which Hirst showed me what there was to see in Diarbekir, which was not much. The chief feature was the wall of black basalt encircling the town, most of the houses being built of the same material. A local proverb describes Diarbekir as famous for its black walls, its black scorpions, and the black hearts of its inhabitants; but I saw no scorpions, and the inhabitants, though wild and fierce, seemed peaceable enough. Knowing neither Kurdish nor

Turkish, I could not talk to them and did not find much to interest me in the town, but inside the hospitable walls of the Consulate I enjoyed every moment of my stay, as indeed I have always enjoyed my chance encounters with members of the Levant Consular Service. I had been told at Constantinople that the only precautions necessary for travel in the wildest parts of Turkey in Asia were a solar topee and a Union Jack, and was glad I had brought them, as Hirst quite agreed. He told me that I should have to take a Turkish gendarme with me, for form's sake, but that the topee and the flag would be worth ten of him. I had no servant, and would have to do my own cooking if I wanted anything different from what the raft-men cooked for themselves, so I bought a frying-pan and two saucepans, one larger than the other. In these I proposed to make porridge, boiling water in the larger and suspending the smaller inside it with a mixture of milk and oat-meal. Beyond laying in a large sack of rice and a small store of groceries, I made no further commissariat arrangements, as Hirst told me that I could buy fowls and eggs and an occasional joint of meat anywhere along the banks; but on his advice I laid green and yellow melons of every size and shape in the little pools which welled up between the grotesquely inflated skins, and just outside the door of my hut I set a huge bowl of grapes.

All was now ready, and early in the morning of the 9th October I hoisted my Union Jack, waved good-bye to Hirst and pushed out into midstream. I had not realised that there was no object to be gained in keeping the raft straight, and was amused

to find that we were apparently to go on turning slowly round and round the whole way. Never was there a more idyllic way of travelling. To quote from Soane, who had done the same journey a year or two before :

“ There is an ease and comfort about it all that only the traveller fresh from the road can appreciate. The abundance of cool, clean water is the chief delight of the journey, contrasting with the ever-present trouble of the road, with its water often enough scarce, and always obtained only at the expense of considerable manual labour. The dust and filth, the long, wearying stages, the trouble of loading and unloading and of seeking food in obscure bazaars when one is dead tired, the awakening from a sleep all too short in the dark before dawn, all these are past, and all there is to do is to lie at full length upon the bales and give oneself up to the luxury of pure laziness and enjoyment of the view.”

We tied up for the first night by a large Kurdish encampment, and I was just going ashore with my smaller saucepan to get some milk, when the gendarme rushed forward to stop me. “ What is the matter ? ” I asked. “ You will die if you go ashore here,” he said in his broken Arabic. “ These people will cut your throat.” “ But I shall die if I have no milk,” I protested. Seeing that I meant to go, he picked up his carbine and prepared to escort me, but I preferred to go without him, as from what I had heard of the attitude of the Kurds to the Turks I thought I should get on better alone. Putting on the famous topee, I walked across to the encampment, where I was greeted with friendly curiosity by the shepherds. As soon as they under-

stood what I wanted, they milked a fat ewe into my saucepan, and refused all payment but a cigarette apiece. The gendarme appeared relieved to see me come back alive, but he left me to make my own purchases for the rest of the journey.

It took nine days to float down to Mosul, as the river was almost at its lowest, but I have never enjoyed a journey more. Soon after leaving Diarbekir the river runs through a range of limestone hills, cutting its way between cliffs three or four hundred feet high. I found that the oars were used not so much to propel the raft as to save it from being dashed to pieces at the bends of the river. Furious rapids were succeeded by long, still reaches of beautifully clear water, down which the raft moved so slowly that I could easily swim to the shore, run along the warm sand, and swim out to meet it again before the rapids came once more. One such bathe I shall always remember. I was dozing in my hut, when I was roused by the raft-man saying "Deep—very deep." I looked out and saw that we were in a reach where the left bank came down steeply into the water, ending in a level terrace screened with tall grasses and a tangle of river flowers. On the other bank was a shingly beach, beyond which stretched a limitless expanse of desert. The cool, green water was deeper than it had ever been before, and I threw off my clothes and plunged in head-foremost, climbing up on to the raft again and again for the rare pleasure of another dive.

My cooking was a perpetual amusement, and the porridge a great success. Every now and then we tied up at some village on the bank, where I bought supplies while the raft-men mended and

blew up any goatskin that had given way. This happened many times in the shallow reaches, where the skins scraped along the river bottom with an indescribable rustling and whispering. I noticed that instead of putting their mouths to the deflated skin, the men would hold it open at least a foot away and blow great gusts against the farther side of the neck. Another sign of lung-power was their perpetual singing, which I found pleasant enough during the day but disturbing at night. The first time that I protested at being woken up the culprit looked sheepish and said, "Sleep was coming upon me, sir," which disarmed my anger. Later on I got used to it, and slept quite peacefully through the loudest chanting.

We had a few alarms when armed men ran alongside and threatened to shoot at us, but the Union Jack scared them off and we were not molested, though one day we came up with a stranded raft, the skins of which had been punctured by bullets and the occupants looted of all they possessed. Our own immunity was due to the fact that word had gone down the river ahead of us that I was a great English Qonsolos, and when we reached the small town of Jazirat ibn Umar I was met by a group of Turkish officials, who begged me to stay the night. I explained that I had to be in Baghdad by a fixed date, and could not stop, upon which they all turned their backs upon me, greatly affronted, and obviously convinced that one day more or less could make no possible difference to a man of my position. I had to run after them and insist upon taking coffee with them before they were appeased.

Thirty miles downstream from Jazirat ibn Umar,

we passed on the left bank a large tributary, the Khabur, which now forms the northern boundary of Iraq, and on the next evening we came to our first Arab village. Two more days brought us to Mosul, the three hundred and thirty miles from Diarbekir having taken us just nine days.

Here the raft was broken up, the poles being sold and the goatskins carried back all the way to Diarbekir for another journey. Hony, the Consul, was away, so I stayed with the ladies of the Church Missionary Society school, who very kindly took me in while my hut was being rebuilt on the very much larger raft which was to take me to Baghdad.

In Hony's absence I did not have much chance while I was at Mosul of picking up the other end of the Young Arab thread which I was trying to follow, but I learnt a certain amount about the general position of the Turks in Iraq. Mosul was at that time the capital of the northernmost of the three Turkish vilayets which now form the kingdom of Iraq, the other two being Baghdad and Basrah. It was also the headquarters of an Army Corps of two Divisions, one of which was at Mosul itself, and the other at Kirkuk. Baghdad was the headquarters of a second Army Corps, also of two Divisions, one being at Baghdad and the other at Basrah. These two Army Corps were recruited locally. I was told that the three vilayets always contributed more than their full share to the Turkish Army, and that there was a Cadet College at Baghdad which turned out forty Iraqi officers every year, many of whom rose to high command. The civil administration, on the other hand, was predominantly Turkish, and the people of the country were in fact if not in name ruled by aliens. At the same time the

Turks were far more closely allied to the Arabs and the Kurds, who formed the majority of the population of the three vilayets, than they had ever been to their Christian subjects in Thrace and Macedonia, and these two subject races, like the Albanians, stood to their fellow-Moslem rulers in a specially close relation. Sectarian differences weakened but by no means removed this connection, and the most fanatical Shiah Moslem felt, as he will always feel, a subconscious bond between himself and the orthodox Sunni which could never link him to the Christian or the Jew.

The two most important foreign influences in the country were the German and the British, the first making itself felt in the Army, the Baghdad railway project, and the domain of archæology, and the second in river navigation and irrigation works. Of these two influences the German was a more recent growth than the British, but it was rapidly assuming formidable proportions. Mosul itself was as yet almost untouched by either, for the central position at the intersection of all the main caravan routes of the northern Middle East, which gave it its name of "the junction," rendered it at the same time almost equidistant from the shores of the Mediterranean, the Black Sea, the Caspian and the Persian Gulf, and removed it as far as possible from contact with the outside world. My hostesses told me that if there was any foreign influence in the town it was mainly religious, and shared between their Mission, which was in touch with the Nestorians, and a French Roman Catholic Mission which worked among the Chaldeans. This was the first I had heard of Christian populations in this part of the world, and I absorbed as much as I could in the

short time left to me, but I am afraid I came away with a very confused idea of the various sects and denominations.

As soon as my new raft was ready, I set out again on my journey to Baghdad. I had nine days left, and the distance I had still to cover was some forty miles less than that from Diarbekir to Mosul which had taken a day longer, but the stream was slower and the risk of being held up by contrary winds much greater, so that I was in some doubt whether I should reach Baghdad by the appointed day. Some fifty miles below Mosul, on the evening of the second day, we swam into an oily surface, due to a discharge from the bitumen springs of Qaiyara, where an oil-bearing stratum has since been proved by the 'Iraq Petroleum Company. The entire river from bank to bank was coated with an iridescent film which looked like a contoured map on which the highest peaks were jet black and the lower levels were shown by concentric rings of every colour of the rainbow. As the raft turned slowly round, and the outlines broke and changed in the setting sun, I thought I had never seen anything so beautiful.

On the following evening we reached Qala'at Shergat, the mound which marks the site of Asshur, the capital of ancient Assyria. Here I was most hospitably entertained by Dr. Andræ and his five colleagues of the German expedition that was digging the mound, and was shown the grave of Tiglath Pileser. An uproarious dinner followed, after which we compared the manual exercises of our respective armies and composed a joint letter to the German Crown Prince, whose accompaniments I had played during his visit to India, when I



was A.D.C. to Sir Louis Dane at Lahore. I was pressed to stay the night, but said that I could not spare the time, as the south wind was blowing hard and our progress was alarmingly slow. The Germans told me that there was no hurry, as the Baghdad railway had reached Samarra and I could count on getting a lift in a construction train. When I told them what had happened to me at Jerablus they gave me a letter to take to the German engineers at rail-head.

I showed this letter the other day to Dr. Jordan, now Director of Archæology in Iraq, who was at Asshur at the time, and asked if he could remember why Dr. Andræ and he had not signed it as well as the other three. He replied that it bore traces of having been written very late in the evening, and that the older members of the party had probably gone to bed.

In spite of being armed with this letter I thought it wiser to take no risks, and drifted away from Asshur in the early morning of the 21st October. I got to Samarra two days later, and walked hopefully across to rail-head, but found no Germans there, and no one who could read the letter. I was told by the local foreman that in any case no train would be coming through for some days, so I had to go back to the raft. When I next visited Samarra, four years later, the railway was being worked by British engineers, the town was in British military occupation, and both town and railway were being bombed by German aeroplanes, one of which may well have been piloted by one of my hosts at Asshur, Hans Lührs, who joined the German Air Force at the outbreak of war, and was afterwards employed on the Iraq front.

On the morning of the day on which I was supposed to arrive at Baghdad I found myself some twenty-five miles upstream, and as the raft-men could not guarantee that we should reach the city that night, I decided to get out and walk the last stage of my journey. The gendarme who had come with me from Samarra did not relish this idea at all, so I left him on the raft and found my way alone, guided for the last three hours by a golden dome and four minarets which swam high in the air above the mirage and could be seen for miles. I reached them soon after noon, and found that I was only at Kadhimain and had still five miles to go, but that I could hire a victoria to drive me the rest of the way. By tea-time I was sitting, dusty and dishevelled, in the drawing-room of the Baghdad Residency, and my solitary cruise was over. My raft-men had been quite right in telling me that they could not guarantee to reach Baghdad by nightfall. They did not tie up to the left bank, just below the date-gardens in which my own house now stands, until next morning, when my luggage was disembarked and brought on mules through the crowded bazaars to the Residency.

I was rather disappointed with my first impression of the capital of the Caliphs. There was no metalled road in Baghdad in those days, and the British Residency and the headquarters of the Tigris and Euphrates Steam Navigation Company were the only modern buildings in the whole city, with the exception of two houses at the edge of the desert on the right bank which had been built for the engineers of the Baghdad railway. This was symptomatic of the two foreign influences which were then at work in Iraq, of which the German

was more powerful with the Turkish element, and the British with the Arab. South of Baghdad there was neither metalled road nor railway, and the only way to get to Basrah was by river-steamer, one of which was due to sail in two days' time.

The Resident at that time was Mr. J. G. Lorimer, whom I had been looking forward to meeting, as he had been at Baghdad for some years, and was an authority on Iraq and the Persian Gulf. Unfortunately, he was away on tour, and though Mrs. Lorimer was kindness itself and took me in at the Residency during my short stay, I lost the opportunity of learning about Iraq at first hand from the man who knew most about the country. The volume of his Gazetteer which deals with Iraq was not published till the following year, after his sad death by accident at Bushire, and there was no up-to-date work on the subject which I could study. The result was that I could do little more than see the sights and pick up what I could as an ordinary traveller. I had enquired at the War Office before I started whether there were any points on which I could collect information, and had been told that Iraq fell within the sphere of the Intelligence Department at Simla. They in their turn told me that they did not think there was anything I could do which would be of any use, and that what struck them most was that I should be able to get permission to travel there at all just then. This shows how little it was foreseen that exactly a year later an Indian expeditionary force would be waiting at Bahrein for the declaration of war with Turkey before proceeding to the Shatt al Arab to occupy Fao and possibly Basrah. Still less was it foreseen that this operation would lead

three years later to the British occupation of Baghdad itself.

I had an uneventful journey to Basrah in the steamer *Blosse Lynch*, with its two attendant barges, one on each side, like the burdens of Issachar. As we wound round the loops and bends of the Tigris I was fascinated and a little repelled by the uniform flatness of the alluvial delta, broken only by high banks of derelict canals and an occasional mound on the site of some great city of the past. Twenty miles south of Baghdad, but forty by river, we passed the great Arch of Ctesiphon, which we had seen for some hours ahead, on either quarter and even astern, so fantastic are the windings of the river. Kut al Amara, Sheikh Saad, Ali Gharbi, Amara, Qurna, names which will live for ever in the history of the British Army, were no more to me than incidents which broke but did not relieve the monotony of the journey. At Gurmat Ali, six miles north of Basrah, the Tigris was joined by the main stream of the Euphrates, which I had crossed seven hundred miles away at Birejik two months before, and from there to the Persian Gulf my way lay along the great waterway of the Shatt al Arab.

I transhipped at Basrah into the British India "slow" mail, which stopped on its way to Karachi at all the main ports of the Gulf—Koweit, Bushire, Bahrein, Lingah, Bandar Abbas, and Muscat. I was rather proud of my trip, and on the train-journey from Karachi I gave a full account of it to my travelling companion, a quiet little man who seemed much impressed. I finished my account by saying that the places I should really like to visit were the romantic cities of Central Asia, Samarkand, Bokhara, and the rest. "I am afraid you would

be disappointed," he said. "They are not nearly so romantic as one would think." "How do you know?" I asked eagerly. "Surely you have not been there?" "Oh yes," he said, "more than once. I travel in needles," and he gave me his card, which I kept for some years as a wholesome reminder not to boast too much about my travels.

# MESOPOTAMIA

## CHAPTER II

### ORTHODOXY (BASRAH, 1915)

Outbreak of war. Sent to Mesopotamia in 1915 as Assistant Political Officer. British base at Basrah. Political officers. Mahrattas. Posted to Revenue Department. Crown estates. Flood protection. The Faid. Shaiba Bund contract. Fao column. The Arab cultivator.

DURING my four months in the Ottoman Empire, of which I had spent one in the Balkans and three in Asiatic Turkey, I had not seen Anatolia, but I had travelled from Belgrade to Basrah and seen only one Turkish village, Birejik, and one Turkish city, Constantinople itself. This drove home to me the fact that outside Anatolia and Constantinople the Turks were just as much foreigners in Turkey as the British in India. Not only had they been foreigners in Turkey in Europe, of which nothing was now left to them but Constantinople and part of Thrace, but they were still foreigners in Syria, Mesopotamia, and Arabia. In Europe and Asia alike the essential difference between them and the British was that they were little more than an army of occupation and had lost their genius for civil administration. As their military power declined they had gradually lost all their European possessions, where their subjects had been for the most part Christians, but they still held the Middle East, where the people were united with them in allegiance to the Sultan as Caliph of Islam. I asked myself how long this

allegiance would last. The leaven of the Young Turk revolt had been working among the Arabs, who were themselves the parents of Islam and heirs to the tradition of as great an empire. To what extent would community of religion with their rulers check the growth of a national movement among them?

I was at Simla on leave in July 1914 and was to have put this question in the course of a lecture on Servia and Turkey at the United Service Institution of India, which was written but never delivered, owing to the outbreak of war. On the actual day that had been fixed for it I found myself whisked into Army Headquarters to help with the censorship; Arabs and Turks naturally faded into the background of my mind at once; and even the despatch of an Indian expeditionary force to Mesopotamia in November left me unmoved. Every officer at Army Headquarters thought that the war would be over in a few months, and there was no competition to be detailed for what we all looked upon as a side-show, since all our efforts were concentrated on getting to France before it was too late.

It was not until the following year, after I had been on the North-West Frontier with my regiment for six months and had practically given up all hope of getting away, that I was suddenly ordered to report to the Chief Political Officer at Basrah. I was Adjutant of the 116th Mahrattas at the time, and found it a great wrench to leave my men, especially as over half of them had been my own recruits. For six years I had been doing my best to keep the Mahratta flag flying, and I confess that I shed a few hot tears as the train carried me away

from the crowd which had come to the station to say good-bye to me ; but I soon recovered, and by the time I got to Karachi I was looking forward with the greatest excitement to my new adventures. I sailed on the 8th November in the British India mail-steamer *Dwarka*, which reached Basrah on the morning of the 14th, after failing to cross the bar, and being delayed twelve hours in consequence. We had also spent the night of the 13th at Mohammerah, owing to the obstruction in the channel caused by two steamers which the Turks sunk in their retreat. Basrah did not look to me very different from what I remembered of it when I passed through in 1913, except that two large captured steamers, with the star and the letters P.S.S. on the funnel which marked all prize steamers, lay at anchor in the stream, one of which was being used as a kind of rest house for officers passing through the Base on the way to or from the front, and the other was a sort of prisoners' base.

I reported myself at the Base Commandant's Office, and was told that I had better find my way to the Political Office, as there were no military orders for me. When I got there I found that both Sir Percy Cox, the Chief Political Officer, and Captain A. T. Wilson, his principal assistant, were away. Sir Percy was with General Nixon at Aziziyah, a small town on the Tigris, only forty-five miles, as the crow flies, from Baghdad, which had been occupied by General Townshend in October, and Wilson had just gone to India on sick leave. Force Headquarters had moved up to Aziziyah on the 5th November, and the advance on Baghdad had started only three days before I reached Basrah. Two other officers who had been



lent to the Political Department, Barrett and Fowle, were just off up-river to join Sir Percy, and I hoped that with any luck I might be allowed to go with them, but to my disappointment I was kept at Basrah and sent to work in the Revenue Commissioner's office. This was nearly two miles away from the river, in Basrah city, on the bank of one of the largest of the tidal creeks that run inland from the Shatt al Arab. It was a substantial brick building with a courtyard in the centre, like all Basrah houses in those days, and had been the Revenue Office under the Turks.

I found that Mr. H. R. C. Dobbs, the Revenue Commissioner, was also away at Aziziyah. When we first arrived at Basrah, and took over the administration of the large and extremely wealthy vilayet which bears its name, there was no officer with the force who had any Civil experience, except Sir Percy Cox, and he was much too busy to find time to organise the Revenue Department, so Dobbs came out in January 1915 to help with Revenue matters, theoretically under General Nixon's direct control but actually in close co-operation with Sir Percy Cox. During the interregnum before he arrived, the records and work of the Turkish Revenue Department had fallen into great disorder, and he had to digest an entirely strange system, conducted in two languages of which he was himself ignorant, and to get some sort of compromise between English and Turkish methods into working order as soon as possible. Luckily, the Turks had not the time, if they had the inclination, to destroy more than a small percentage of the most valuable records in their headlong flight, or it is impossible to say how long it would have taken to get affairs

into any sort of order ; as it was, he had been wonderfully successful. It will be remembered that I was told at Mosul in 1913 that the majority of Civil officials in the Baghdad and Basrah vilayets were Turks, and this was true of all the responsible officers, who naturally disappeared with the British occupation, but the clerical staff were to a considerable extent local, and their services proved of the greatest value.

In those early days I naturally assumed, with everyone else out there, that Mesopotamia would be annexed to the British Empire, the only doubt being whether it would come under India or not. It seemed certain that to be a Political Officer during the war would give a young officer a good chance of embarking upon a fresh career as an administrator in the new province, and this to some extent made up for the disappointment of not being with the troops in the field. On the 20th November another recruit to the Political Department arrived at Basrah in the person of Mr. H. St. J. B. Philby, and we spent long hours discussing the future and the best line of approach to our new careers. Holland, the Deputy Chief Political Officer, told us that one of us would certainly go up-river while the other stayed at Basrah, and he telegraphed to Sir Percy to know which it was to be. No answer came for some days, and in the meanwhile we had each discovered slight leanings, luckily in opposite directions, Philby wanting to go up and I to stay. Holland let Sir Percy know this, and recommended that I should be definitely posted to the Revenue Department at Basrah. Sir Percy replied that Philby had better stay at Basrah for the present, and it very soon became clear that the capture of Baghdad was still

a long way off, but as he did not mention me in his telegram, Holland assumed that his proposal was approved. I accordingly moved my quarters to Basrah on the 28th, and settled down with Boxwell, the Military Governor of Basrah, and Mackenzie, in a typical Basrah house with two stories of narrow, badly paved rooms set round a central courtyard, in the middle of which was the only drain-pipe in the house. Philby, who had been working in Basrah with me, was taken away by Holland to look after the accounts of the province, and was soon afterwards appointed Financial Assistant to the Chief Political Officer.

On the same day that I thus embarked on my Civil career I got a belated letter from Hungerford, of my own regiment, who had been with the 117th Mahrattas at the battle of Kut al Amara. In this he said :

“ I will begin by telling you that this *paltan* (the 117th Mahrattas) has made a great name for itself over its brilliant performance. The men were really marvellous and are now honestly the admiration of the whole force. They had to advance over a ‘ billiard table ’ as usual, and attack a redoubt, or rather ‘ occupy ’ a redoubt which was supposed to be vacated by the enemy. They had a most murderous fire brought on them at very close range, but they never even checked. Not a single man fell behind to look after wounded. A man was done up and left behind as he should be, and the men went on as hard as ever, cheering like hell all the time. Our casualties of 45 per cent. speak for themselves. One really could not have seen a more dashing display of absolute recklessness. I can only describe them as wonderful.”

In the first week of December, Force Headquarters, and with them Sir Percy Cox, came back to Basrah, and details of the unsuccessful attempt to reach Baghdad gradually became known. Dobbs, who also came back for a short time, gave us a first-hand account of the battle of Ctesiphon, where he and Sir Percy were with Sir John Nixon, very much nearer than they should have been to the firing-line—all the brains of Mesopotamia, as Dobbs naïvely remarked, under a tremendous fire. Bullard, too, who came down with the wounded, gave us a vivid picture of their sufferings, as they lay without blankets in the bitter wind which swept the iron decks through all the nine or ten icy nights that the voyage lasted. It was sad to hear that Townshend was now shut up in Kut al Amara, the Turks having reoccupied the lines out of which they had been so gallantly driven in the action about which Hungerford had written to me. And it was difficult to explain to two of my own Indian officers, who arrived at that moment with a detachment of my own recruits, that there was no chance, so far as I could see, of my ever coming to join them.

Bullard, who had been Consul at Basrah before the war, and was one of the most brilliant of the Political Officers, joined us in our little mess in Boxwell's house, and for a week or two I wrestled with Revenue matters in the office. Then I was sent off by Dobbs to inspect some Crown estates down the river at Da'eji and Dawasir. The properties consisted entirely of date-groves, and I was supposed to see that the tenants were doing what they should in the way of digging up the land under the trees, cleaning the small creeks and inlets,

and strengthening the "sadds" or embankments that keep out the floods which come in the spring. Irrigation in the date-gardens of Basrah is a simple matter. Canals are dug at right angles to the main waterway of the Shatt al Arab, and connected by a gridiron of smaller creeks. The tide drives the water all over this network of channels, which extends in some places as much as three miles inland, where the belt of palm-groves is succeeded by virgin desert, scarred here and there with the long-dry remains of old canals which no longer repay cleaning out. When the tide turns in the Shatt al Arab, a creek fifty or sixty yards wide becomes an unattractive stretch of evil-smelling mud, with the merest trickle of water running down its centre. The only form of bridge to be found anywhere in those days was a palm-trunk thrown across the channel, easy enough to negotiate bare-foot, but a terror to the booted. When the channel was too wide for one trunk to bridge it, a knife-rest of two other trunks was planted in the middle, and connected to either bank by a swaying and slippery cat-walk. I found that the only way to get across one of these double bridges was to run full pelt to the middle and cling to the centre support ; then to make another dash for the opposite bank. I had a little clerk with me, called Da'oud Effendi, who amused me very much by his inability to understand why anyone should walk a yard or do a stroke of work beyond what is absolutely necessary, and by his terror of the local bridges. He used to press little gifts of cheese, peppermints, and date chutney on me at the most inconvenient times, and was quite hurt if I did not immediately consume them.

It was during my solitary Christmas at Dawasir

that I had my first experience of Mesopotamian mud and rain. It is difficult for anyone who has not seen the effect of rain upon the flat alluvial desert of the Basrah delta to form any idea of the resulting abomination. A particularly glutinous kind of mud is evolved in which it is almost impossible to stand upright, and in which cars and carts stick fast, and horses and camels slide in every direction. In these conditions, and with my primitive appliances, which consisted of a compass set in a match-box and a protractor made by myself out of a visiting-card, it took me ten days to make a sketch of and report on the property, and I did not get back to Basrah till the second week in January, as I had to inspect two other properties on the way.

I came back on my pony along the edge of the desert behind the belt of date-groves which fringes the Shatt al Arab, and found that Dobbs had again disappeared on one of his up-river tours. Bullard had been appointed Assistant Revenue Commissioner, Basrah, with myself as his assistant. Holland had been invalided and his post of Deputy to Sir Percy Cox remained unfilled until December 1916, when Wilson, who had meanwhile made himself indispensable in the Chief Political Office, was appointed to succeed him. I had heard great stories of Wilson before I left for Da'aji and was much impressed when I first made his acquaintance. He was an ideal second-in-command in those days of improvisation, and his boundless energy and phenomenal memory were the admiration of everyone who came in contact with him. Living as I did in Basrah City, I did not see as much of him as I should have liked to do, but his personality made itself felt almost as strongly from a distance, and I

always knew when I had got through to the great A. T. himself from the masterful rattle of the receiver as he snatched it from the telephone.

January 1916 was a depressing month in Basrah, with its repeated story of disappointed efforts to relieve Kut al Amara, and the gloom deepened with the setting in of the winter rain. There was an unbroken downpour for four days, from the 22nd to the 26th, and the camps which stretched for five miles upstream from Basrah itself became one vast morass. I was not personally affected by this, in comfortable quarters a few yards away from my office, but I was thoroughly ashamed of myself for having become a civilian, and hated the thought of what my own men were suffering up-river. I was to some extent consoled by a telegram from Dobbs, thanking me for my report on the Crown Lands, and telling me to get it printed and my maps copied. The revenue work was also extremely interesting, and I had just begun to settle down to it when I was suddenly taken away from the office for quite different employment.

That blessed word Mesopotamia (the land between the rivers) which has now been rubbed out of our maps and guide-books, was an admirable descriptive name for the country which lies between the Tigris and the Euphrates and is dominated from every point of view by those waters. Look down upon it from the air and you see a great stretch of featureless desert through which wander two gleaming ribbons edged with narrow strips of vegetation. A network of spidery lines covers the ground between these ribbons, and marks the system of disused canals which once irrigated the whole country. Southwards there are swamps and

lakes as well as desert, and spilled out here and there like pools of quicksilver are the great overflows which if properly controlled would once again convert the desert into a garden. When the floods come down and the waters prevail exceedingly, as they have done every year since the days of Noah, hundreds of square miles of alluvial flat are also covered with a film of shallow water.

The largest of the permanently flooded areas lies between the two rivers just above the point where they meet to form the great waterway of the Shatt al Arab. The main stream of the Euphrates now joins the Tigris at Gurmat Ali, six miles above the town of Basrah, but not so long ago the junction was at Qurna, thirty-five miles farther upstream on the Tigris. Later on the Euphrates burst its right bank and spread across to the gravel ridge which edges the real desert and runs from Ur of the Chaldees to the little desert town of Zobeir. By degrees it cut for itself a new channel to Gurmat Ali, but this was not deep enough to hold the increased volume of water in the flood season, and every year the alluvial plain between Basrah and Zobeir was also flooded, right down to the ancient mouth of the combined Tigris and Euphrates at the head of what is now called the Khor Abdullah. At the same time, the surplus water from the swollen creeks which take off from the Shatt al Arab every few hundred yards from Gurmat Ali to Fao joined with the Euphrates overflow to flood the Basrah plain.

In his fascinating report to the Turkish Government on the Irrigation of Mesopotamia, Sir William Willcocks describes this tract as follows :

“ The land itself is exceedingly rich, and the strip stretching west of a line joining Basrah to Zobeir,



some sixteen kilometres in length by twelve in width, though under water to-day, was, in the time of the early Khalifs, covered with date-groves, gardens and orchards, and considered at that time as one of the four earthly paradises. How they reclaimed this land is easy to understand from the description of the Arab historians. The Tigris joined the Euphrates higher up its course, probably at Qurna, and the land flooded to-day was then a marsh. A channel was dug along the edge of the desert from the Euphrates to opposite Zobeir, which was then known as Basrah. This canal took a right angular bend at Zobeir and made straight for the Shatt al Arab down the line of the present Ashar creek to the modern Basrah which was then known as Ubulla (Apollyon). This rectangular canal, which was known as the 'Faid' (or flood canal) of Basrah, provided the irrigation waters for these lands."

I have quoted this in full, partly for the pleasure of recording the ancient name of Basrah, which it certainly earned once more during the war, but chiefly for the description of the "Faid," which will appear again.

The Turks took no steps to stop this flooding. They were quite content to keep Basrah and the date-gardens high and dry by means of small protective earth banks running along the creeks, and across from creek to creek at the desert limit of cultivation, and by 1914 they had made no improvement. The result was that during the flood season in the spring of 1915 our troops at Basrah found themselves upon an island, with the Shatt al Arab on the east and a flooded area ten miles wide on the west, cutting them off from their outposts and detachments on the Shaiba-Zobeir

ridge. The battle of Shaiba, which finally consolidated our position at Basrah, was fought on the 14th April, 1915, under these conditions, and all reinforcements and supplies from Basrah had either to be carried by boat across the "Faid" or taken round through the shallower water to the Zobeir end of the ridge. This flooding could not be allowed to continue, for the railway which was eventually to reach Baghdad had to be carried from the Base Supply Depot at Magil, with its deep water berths for ocean steamers, across the flat plain and outside the continuous chain of camps, depots, dumps, and hospitals which crowded the date-gardens, to the higher ground at Zobeir. To allow the flood-water to come right up to the railway embankment was to run an unnecessary risk of the line being washed away, and was also undesirable for reasons of health, so the plan was to throw another embankment straight across from behind Magil to Shaiba. This would have the added advantage of keeping a very large area of flat desert outside the railway embankment free from danger of flooding and available for training and extra camping grounds. The section of this protective embankment, which came to be known as the Shaiba Bund, was to be sixty square feet and its length fifty-one thousand feet, or just under ten miles, so that about three million cubic feet of earthwork had to be done. Taking eighty cubic feet as an easy day's digging for one man, this meant that five hundred men ought to be able to finish the earthwork in about two and a half months, and revetting the face of the bund to prevent erosion would not take long. The flooded area would be dry enough for work to begin early

in November, and the floods were not due again until April, so that there were five whole months in hand. It sounded at the time, and still sounds, quite absurdly simple, but it was not by any means so simple as it sounded.

In the first place there was no member of the military staff who had any knowledge of local conditions or of the effect of wind, tide, and rain on the water and soil of the Tigris-Euphrates delta. The Indian Army Reserve officer who was in charge of the work, under the inappropriate and rather ill-omened title of Irrigation Officer, had experience only of Indian irrigation work. His two assistants, Pollard and Terrel, excellent fellows both and certainly no less capable, were also without local experience. Another mistake was that in the absence up-river of General Nixon and Sir Percy Cox, the military authorities made their own arrangements for local labour without consulting the Political Department, which was responsible for all relations with the local inhabitants. The method chosen was to put all available military labour on to the railway embankment and to make a contract for the Shaiba Bund with a local contractor, who gaily undertook to find three thousand men and to supply them with fuel and water, in return for which he was to be paid so much for every thousand cubic feet of work done. There was no penalty clause if he failed to produce the three thousand or to supply their wants, nor did anyone apparently take the trouble to find out whether there was any chance of his fulfilling his contract. If they had, they would have been told at once that it was out of the question.

The population of the Basrah district, and indeed

of the whole of the then occupied territory in Mesopotamia, was almost entirely agricultural. The local agriculturist, who had in most cases a considerable stake in the one or more date-gardens which constituted his holding, was at that season extremely busy. He was a simple, bearded soul, dressed in a single garment like a dirty night-shirt, and armed with a primitive triangular spade on a roughly turned shaft six or seven feet long. He lived on dates and unleavened bread, washed down with an occasional cup of very strong and bitter black coffee. His home was a hut of reed matting stretched over an arched framework of reeds tied in bundles. He knew no discipline and no comfort. His life was spent in pruning his date-palms, clearing the tiny water-channels which intersected his garden, and building up the little banks which protected it from floods. He was not at all eager to leave his home and risk permanent damage to his holding merely to earn a few rupees on purely temporary work, and it was soon found that nothing like three thousand of him would do so.

The Shaiba Bund contract was at first meant to be purely experimental, and could have been cancelled at the end of the first fortnight. But this was not done, although by that time the contractor had only managed to gather together four or five hundred men. He was allowed to go on making his profit, and all that happened was that an appeal was made by the Irrigation Officer for labour to be imported from India. Another month went by before the Political Authorities were asked to help by impressing local labour through the *sirkals* or headmen. Sir Percy Cox had by this time come back to Basrah and things began to move. Pressure

was at once brought to bear on the local authorities, tempting accounts were spread abroad of the profits to be made from piece-work, and dire threats were held out of what the great British Government would do to those who refused to take advantage of their benevolence. These steps had immediate effect. By the 31st December the number of workmen had increased to eleven hundred, and by the 22nd January to over two thousand. Ten out of the fifty thousand feet of the bund had been thrown up, and if all went well the remaining forty thousand should be completed in a fortnight.

But now for the first time Nature took a hand, and made a determined effort to spoil the game. Heavy rain fell for four days on end, from the 22nd to the 26th January, and brought all work to a standstill. I have already described the effect of rain upon the alluvium of the Basrah district, which puts earthwork quite out of the question, as the turned-up soil clings to the spade and cannot be dislodged, even if it could be carried through the morass to the place where it is wanted. Even under cover life is almost intolerable and without shelter it is impossible, but no shelter had been provided for the wretched workmen. In spite of his failure to fulfil the terms of his contract, the original contractor had been kept on; and the impressed labour had been put under his charge as if he had produced it himself. He was quite unable to cope with the increased numbers and apparently made no effort to do so. He did not even pay small daily wages while the men had to remain idle, but even if this had been done it is doubtful whether a retaining fee of eight annas a

day would have been enough to induce two thousand half-clothed cultivators to sit in their night-shirts for any length of time on the mud in heavy rain with nothing to eat. Be this as it may, when the rain came all except the original four hundred, who lived in the neighbourhood and came to work daily, ran away.

Matters were now getting serious. On the 10th February Sir Percy Cox was told that the labour which had been expected from India could not be sent, and that local labour simply must be collected. Efforts were redoubled, liberal rewards were offered to headmen, and a small mobile column was sent down the river to Fao to whip up a thousand men from the more distant villages. To my delight I was one of the two Political Officers who were sent with this column. It was a joy to be on my pony and with troops again, even on such an unmilitary expedition as this. Our route lay parallel to the Shatt al Arab along the track by which I had ridden back to Basrah a month before. We started each morning in the fresh winter dawn, and marched for an hour or two along the line of telegraph poles which danced away southwards in the mirage. Not a soul was to be seen, and the only sign of life was the thin pungent smoke of date-frond fires wreathing up here and there through the trees. We would halt opposite what seemed to be a more important village and send messengers across the sand into the cool labyrinth of the gardens to get hold of the *sirkal*. By the time we had finished lunch, an old patriarch with two or three ragged attendants would shuffle blinking out into the glare and squat in the shade of the tent-flap to drink his ceremonial coffee. When he heard what we wanted

it was surprising how anxious he was to help, but how difficult he found it. The percentage of blind, deaf, dumb, and insane among his flock was unbelievably high. Of the few able-bodied men none could possibly be spared, and it was only by threatening undefined horrors if the contingent had not started in each case by the time the column passed the village on its way back that we managed to collect our thousand men.

## CHAPTER III

### EARTHWORK (SHAIBA, 1916)

Organisation of labour on Shaiba Bund. Mud and rain. The old Euphrates bed. Bridging with sand-bags. Summary measures. Attacked in rear. Revetment. Eating the eye. Lawrence at Basrah. Mah-rattas again. Captain A. T. Wilson.

I CAME back from Fao by steamer, flagging a great troopship as it crossed the bar, and retracing in eight hours the stages which the column had taken as many days to march. Sir Percy Cox told me that while we had been away two thousand more men had been rounded up, that he had taken over all responsibility for keeping the number on the bund up to strength, and that he wanted me to go out to live at Magil and help the Irrigation Officer as far as I could.

It was now the 24th February. Less than two months remained before that great smooth river, the River Euphrates, would come down in flood, swollen by the overflow of his turbulent twin the Tigris, and there was no time to be lost. I went out to Magil the same evening and induced the Irrigation Officer, who was still faithfully paying all the men through the original contractor, to cancel the contract forthwith. This meant that I had to make myself responsible not only for organising and paying the labour, but also for hutting, rations, water, and tools. The supply work was soon arranged, with the help of two keen young Indian Army officers of the 76th Punjabis, McElwaine and Darrell, but



organisation of the labour was more difficult. I found when I rode along the bund on a motor-cycle on the first morning that the narrow strip on which the bund was to stand had been marked out right across the flat desert to Shaiba, ten miles away, and skeleton profiles set up all along it to show its correct shape. Sixty feet away another parallel line had been drawn. The section of the bund having an area of sixty square feet, a shallow excavation, or borrow-pit, had to be dug to a uniform depth of one foot between the bund and the outer line in order to get exactly the right amount of earth to fill up the profile. This ten-mile borrow-pit was divided all along its length into a series of small borrow-pits, each twenty-five feet long, which were inspected and paid for as soon as they were finished. But the labour was apparently not organised at all, and there was no way of regulating the number of men who worked in any one borrow-pit, or of ensuring that each man did a fair day's work. I saw some pits with fifteen men in them and others with only five, but what puzzled me more was that almost from the first I began to pass empty borrow-pits in which no work was being done, but which seemed to be reserved for some reason by a cabalistic sign scratched upon the ground. In several of these empty pits free fights were going on, and it took me some time to find out what was happening.

It turned out to be this. There were two small camps of reed-mat huts, one at chainage 0, where the bund took off from the railway embankment at Magil, and one at chainage 11,000, two miles out in the desert. A third was just being started at chainage 21,500, but many of the men were still not housed. No one wanted to walk farther to his

work than he was obliged to, and if he and his gang could stake out their claim in a block of borrow-pits not too far away, they could rest assured that for some days at least they would not have to go any farther. Allah alone knew what might not happen before the block was dug out. With any luck it might rain again and work might stop, or perhaps a relief gang would be sent from the village and a man could go back to his own garden. The result was that instead of there being a continuous embankment up to a certain point, and unworked ground beyond, there was a string of forlorn and solitary barrows of varying lengths stretching for miles across the plain, and Indian overseers were scurrying backwards and forwards from barrow to barrow on jaded ponies, vainly trying to measure up the borrow-pits and give the unruly gangs their precious payment vouchers.

For the next four days I had to race out again and again at forty miles an hour to head off any gang which tried to start work on a distant borrow-pit, and force it to come in towards chainage 0, so that the work could be consolidated. But I could not very well drive out the gangs which had already started to dig, and by the time I had succeeded in breaking down the old system the chain of isolated mounds had actually extended to chainage 41,625, no less than eight miles away.

These four days, from the 25th to the 28th February, were also employed in organising the supply problem. I found that the camps were being supplied by lorry, camel, and Army Transport cart. This was all very well in the dry tree, but what would be done in the green? As soon as the next rain came the whole supply system would break

down and all the men would either starve or run away. I noticed that there was a very large creek on the up-river side of the bund which ran up to within four hundred yards of the camp at chainage 11,000, so I arranged at once for supplies to be brought by water to a depot camp on the creek, from which all three camps could draw their rations by hand even if it rained. Fortunately, this too was in working order by the 28th February, on which day Nature took a hand once more. Heavy rain fell again and continued for three days, stopping the work and cutting off all land communication with the camps, but the supplies came regularly, the huts had been built, and as a retaining fee was paid to the men only eighty of our three thousand ran away.

While the rain fell we were marooned as effectively by the mud as if we had been on an island. All we could do was to make plans for the future and try to work up some kind of organisation out of our very unpromising material. Pollard, who was really in charge of the work, lived with me at camp 21,500, nearly half-way to Shaiba, where two out of our three thousand workmen were now safely housed in huts of reed-matting. He and I had small tents and there was also a large marquee in which we met the headmen every evening and drank coffee with all due ceremony. At these meetings reports were made of any defection in the ranks, grievances and complaints were discussed and settled, and inter-village rivalry stimulated.

McElwaine and Darrell were in charge of the supply depot on the creek at chainage 11,000, and Pollard and I plodded across every day to help them to do the same kind of thing as we were doing

ourselves. Their camp was nominally kept in order by a Haji of attractive and plausible habit, who was just the type of Oriental with whom Lord Cromer describes the British official as honeymooning, but whose relations with the uncompromising McElwaine never got so far as courtship. He had a disarming smile, and when scolded, as he often had to be, he would look at one with engaging frankness and say, "By Allah and by thy head I love thee : we have none but thee to lead us in the right way." This of course cut no ice with McElwaine, who did not understand him. He tried it again with me on the last day of the rain, and I called him an old humbug. "What is humbug, my brother ?" he asked. Not knowing the Arabic for it, I asked McElwaine's Egyptian interpreter, who only spoke French, to tell the Haji he was a "blagueur." Unfortunately he thought the word I used was "blackguard," and translated it by some terrible Arabic expression which I fear rather shocked the Haji.

On our way back across the plain to our own camp Pollard and I were caught in a blinding hail-storm. The plain was already sodden with rain and it took us over an hour and a half to trudge back against the wind. When at last we reached the bund and were on the point of crossing it, a flash of lightning showed us a pitiful little drenched figure on top of the embankment. It was my faithful Indian bearer Fazal Karim. "The Sahib's tent has fallen," he wailed. "Whose tent ?" we shouted. "The Sahib's kit is soaked," he replied. "Which Sahib's kit ?" we shouted again. "The books and papers and all the clothes have fallen into the water," shrieked the little man, wringing

his hands. By this time we had climbed to the top of the bund, and another flash showed me that, as I had feared, it was *my* tent which had blown over. Mercifully, the marquee was still standing, so I turned in there, threw off my wet things, wrapped myself up in dry blankets, drank a whole bottle of French vermouth through the neck and woke up next morning none the worse. But it was a long time before my things were dry again.

As soon as the rain showed signs of stopping we tested our new organisation in miniature by making the men throw up a protective earth-wall round each camp, as the ground was still too wet for serious earthwork. Each village was given a length of this tiny bund exactly proportioned to the number of villagers at the camp, and small prizes were offered to those who did best. At the supply depot this work was fully justified, since the large creek on which the depot stood was tidal, the moon was at half, and the level of the water was rising daily. Pollard and I realised that in another week or so this tide would be at its height and the creek would overflow, so we decided on our own responsibility to keep back some of McElwaine's men for the present and put them on to building a causeway to connect the camp with the bund. The remaining two thousand three hundred trooped out on the following day and were given the job of throwing up a light section of the main bund from camp 21,500 on towards Shaiba. Pollard's surveyors ran out a line twenty-five feet away from the site of the bund and I strode along this, pacing out a task for each village which allowed four feet of length or a hundred cubic feet of earthwork to every man. I took the headmen with me and left

each in his own borrow-pit with instructions to see that it was finished in the day. Thanks to our preliminary canters, it only took half an hour to spread the gangs out over a length of nearly a mile, and as soon as they were safely at work, Pollard and I went back to camp for our motor-cycles and rode on to see how the land lay.

We found that as far as chainage 38,000, or about three miles beyond our own camp, the plain was uniformly dry and earthwork quite easy, but at this point we came to a stretch of two miles where the ground was sodden and it looked as if no work could be done for days. The line of the bund here crossed the almost imperceptibly lower level which ages ago had formed the old bed of the Euphrates, and down which the Arab Caliphs had dug the Faid, or irrigation canal, described by Sir William Willcocks. The whole of this old Euphrates bed was a regular sponge which Pollard thought unlikely to dry for over a fortnight, and which in fact remained unworkable for the next twenty-four days. Dotted in a straight line across the quagmire were the isolated barrows of dry earth which represented the disconnected efforts of the earlier workmen, but they were quite valueless, as there was no getting from one to the other. If we had only known what was going to happen to the old Euphrates bed, we should have encouraged rather than dissuaded the independent gangs who had been driven in with such labour only a week before, but apparently no one in authority remembered Sir William's report or thought of the Faid or of the old Euphrates. The Irrigation Officer certainly did not, or, if he did, he drew no deductions from it, for as long ago as the 3rd February he had been

offered six hundred men from Zobeir to begin on the bund from the Shaiba end. Instead of accepting them with joy, he left the letter unanswered for a fortnight, and then waited another week before sending an officer to get them started, not upon the Shaiba Bund, but upon the Zobeir end of the railway embankment. These six hundred were now working back from the Shaiba end under Terrell's supervision, but they would be just as helpless when they reached the old Euphrates bed as we were. If the Irrigation Officer had only set them to work when they were first offered to him, the whole of this dangerous gap would at least have been bridged by a light section of earthwork before the rain came, but we knew nothing of this at the time : our only concern was what to do now.

We came to the conclusion during our ride back that we must at all costs push a line of some sort across the desert to Shaiba before the floods came down. It was true that with any luck the old Euphrates bed ought to dry before then, but we dared not take the risk. More rain might come at any time, and earthwork might again be made impossible. Nothing must stand in the way of running some kind of dry causeway across to the Shaiba ridge which would at least provide a foothold for the men in case it rained again. It was of course very tempting to keep our newly organised labour on the first seven miles of the bund and to complete it to full section while the Euphrates bed was drying. But what would be the good of a full-sized embankment stretching out for seven miles across the desert, if two miles were still unbridged and the whole Euphrates flood came pouring through it ?

We found the Irrigation Officer at our camp when we got back and had a long discussion with him. He was not very willing to accept suggestions, as he had already decided to disapprove of our small protective banks and of the supply depot causeway, both of which he regarded as waste of time and labour. He was convinced at last, but not until it was time to attend the evening meeting in the big marquee, and we were all tired out and rather bad-tempered. What Pollard suggested and what was eventually decided was that the only way to bridge the two-mile gap of slush was to fill sand-bags with dry earth at a point just short of the old Euphrates bed, and to lay them across it in two lines to make a kind of double causeway, as it were sapping across to the farther side. Three hundred and fifty thousand sand-bags would be wanted, which meant that each of our two thousand five hundred men would have to make a hundred and forty journeys over a gradually increasing distance of anything up to two miles. The bags would in the first place have to be filled and stacked as near the starting-point as possible, so as not to increase the carry more than absolutely necessary.

We calculated that with our new organisation the light section of the bund which we were throwing up to start with would reach the Euphrates bed in two days, so that we had this time in which to prepare for filling the sand-bags. With the help of Naidu Babu, Pollard's best Indian surveyor, I marked out two great V-shaped lines, one behind the other, at chainage 37,500, the last point where the ground was really dry. Along the arms of these two Vs, where the sand-bags were to be filled and stacked, we made a line of small borrow-pits cor-



responding in size with the numbers of the village gangs. The three hundred and fifty thousand empty bags were then brought out by lorry and dumped at the centre of the forward V. By the evening of the 6th March the light section of the bund had been finished up to the edge of the wet ground, and on the next day we took all the available men from both camps and marched them down to the old Euphrates. The empty bags were distributed to the gangs at the rate of a hundred to each man, and carried off to the borrow-pits along the two Vs. Here they were filled and stacked, just under a quarter of a million being done in the day. The first two hundred were built up into a kind of conductor's rostrum at the centre of the forward V, where I took my stand with a shrill whistle in my hand to supervise the work. We had explained at the meeting on the night before that when the whistle blew, everyone was to stop work and wait for orders. This worked well, and I felt quite a thrill when the whole army of untrained ragamuffins stopped work as one man to hear what the Hákim had to say. This might be that all the bags should be stacked with their mouths pointing in the same direction, or that such-and-such a village was slacking (the others loved this), or that I wanted Naidu Babu. Whatever I called out was taken up and repeated by them all. "Naidu Babu—u—u, Naidu Babu—u—u," they cried, and from a remote corner of the farther V a familiar khaki-clad figure emerged and came running across amid shouts of laughter and encouragement to see what I wanted.

The next day we started making our two-mile causeway across the old Euphrates bed, laying the

bags flat down in the slush in two lines a few inches apart. As soon as each man had got to the end of the gradually lengthening causeway he would tip down his load and come back through the mud so as to leave the dry footway clear for the men who were following with loads. At first everyone enjoyed the fun, and even when the line got longer and longer it was wonderful how willingly they worked. Those from our own camp had three miles and those from McElwaine's depot five miles to walk to and from the work at the beginning and end of the day, but again and again they did as many as three trips to the extreme end of the old Euphrates bed, stumbling along the uneven line of sand-bags for nearly two miles with two or even three filled bags on their shoulders, and splashing back knee-deep in the mud to get another load. I doubt whether any other labour in the world would have worked better.

There were of course exceptions. On one occasion when I came back on my motor-cycle from camp 11,000, where I had been arbitrating about a tin of ghee between McElwaine and the Haji, I found that a rot had set in, and instead of going to the end of the causeway and dumping their bags where they were wanted, the rascals were tilting them off into the mud at the side. Drastic measures were clearly necessary. I snatched from Hamza, one of the headmen, a beautiful malacca cane which he always carried, and rushed along the causeway to catch someone in the act. Shrieks of laughter greeted me, and the ragged creatures all leaped out into the mud as far as they could go to escape my wrath, but I managed to catch one of them, a big black negro from Mohammerah, and

made Hamza hold him while I picked up his one ragged garment and gave him a dozen of the best. The word ran down the line like wildfire that the Hákim had gone mad and that bags must be properly carried, and we had no more trouble. Hamza looked at me gravely, where I stood panting with the shreds of his malacca in my hand, and said, "I have been greatly honoured this day, my brother." "How do you mean, Hamza?" I asked. I was horrified when he pulled up his muslin trouser-leg and showed me an angry weal across his thigh where one of my blows had found the wrong target, but he did not seem to mind either the weal or his broken cane, and bore me no ill-will.

This heart-breaking work went on for nearly three weeks, fifty thousand men-days being spent in merely laying down a causeway which as a matter of fact was afterwards buried under ordinary earth-work just before the floods came down. The good spirits with which the men started to work evaporated as time went on, and, though we had instituted a system of village reliefs which gave alternate weeks on and off duty, discontent began to show itself in a number of desertions. We had a small Indian infantry detachment at each camp which was supposed to act as a guard, but these detachments were primarily intended to keep watch over the rations and stores, and were far too weak to prevent the men from running away. I applied again and again through the Irrigation Officer for reinforcements, but nothing happened, and by the 17th March matters reached a climax. I motored in to Magil and telephoned to Sir Percy Cox, but could not get him, so in despair I rang up the Chief of the General Staff. Knowing that this great man was not likely to listen

to the voice of one crying in the wilderness, I told him that Sir Percy had authorised me to apply to him direct for a hundred more soldiers on the bund. He expressed some surprise at the urgency of the demand, but I explained that I had repeatedly applied before through the proper channels without success, and assured him that unless the detachment arrived before dawn on the next day I must ask to be relieved of all responsibility for keeping the labour on the bund. I then prowled round the camp till midnight, when at last, to my great relief, a very large and rather angry officer appeared in the moonlight, having marched his company all the way from Basrah City. Foreseeing trouble, I rode into Magil again next morning and rang up Sir Percy Cox. "Oh! is that you?" he said. "What did you mean by telling the C.G.S. yesterday that I had authorised you to ring him up?" "I'm sorry, sir," I said. "I tried to get you, but you were out." "But it was not true," said he. "No, sir," I said, "but he wouldn't have listened to me otherwise." "Well, don't do it again," said the distant voice, and I was emboldened to ask at once for another hundred men. Unfortunately, it was a week before the second lot arrived, and meanwhile another two hundred Arabs had run away. We did not mind this so much now, as our causeway was nearly finished, the old Euphrates bed was drying rapidly, and meanwhile we could go on piling up the rest of the bund to full section.

But Nature had another shock in store for us. On the 22nd March, just as we had laid the last sand-bag, we were surprised by a film of flood-water coming across the desert from the *south*. We could hardly believe our eyes. Where on earth was it

coming from ? If we were to be attacked in rear as well as in front it really seemed hopeless to go on. Helped by the Shamál, the north-west wind, the tidal flooding of the big creek at camp 11,000 had, as we expected, grown with the waxing moon, and the causeway which the Irrigation Officer disliked so much had for some days formed our only connection with the supply depot. But now the wind had changed to the south-east and we found that our new enemy was a sheet of high tide-water which had been blown right across the desert from the Khor Abdullah through the unfinished railway embankment behind us. It was true that it was not more than one or two inches deep, and would normally dry in a very short time. But when it came up against our precious lines of sand-bags it would naturally pile itself up, and there was grave risk of the spongy ground which had been slowly drying for the last three weeks becoming a morass once more.

Pollard and I leapt on to our motor-cycles and dashed off to the old Euphrates bed. The film of water had already reached the causeway, the south-east wind was blowing strongly, and it was clear that the only way to make an outlet for the new water was to breach our own line of sand-bags. We tore across the causeway to the Shaiba end, and with the help of four belated men from the Zobeir gang, who were not at all anxious to come with us, we succeeded in making twenty or thirty gaps in the causeway by pulling up the sand-bags which we had just laid with so much labour. Pollard was duly cursed for this by the Irrigation Officer, but by the following morning the casual water had all been blown right away except along a length of about a

quarter of a mile where the causeway had grown too high and thick to be broken. At this point the water piled up and the spongy ground was soaked again, giving us a great deal of trouble later on.

This was not the only time that we had as it were to turn our rear-rank about and fight an enemy advancing from both sides at the same time. Early in April I was taken off the bund and given other work to do at Magil, but I was still generally responsible for the labour. I was at breakfast one morning when I was rung up by my friend Boxwell, the Military Governor of Basrah. "The Philistines are upon thee, Samson," he said. "What's up?" I asked. "Your old friend the Khor Abdullah is at it again," he said. "You'd better look out." He explained that the tide-water from the south was coming up to a much more alarming extent than before. Pollard and I had assumed that the equinoctial tides of the 19th March would raise the water to the highest possible point, but we had not reckoned with the power of the Sharqi, or south-east wind, which blew on this occasion for five days on end with terrific violence. I rushed out from Magil on my motor-cycle to warn Pollard of the new attack, making a wide detour into the desert on the way to see for myself how serious the danger was. I found a larger and deeper film of water than before, and saw that unless something was done at once the whole of the old Euphrates bed would be made unworkable just as the real floods from the north were due. Our causeway was by now too thick to be broken as we had broken it before, some of it having already been buried under a light-section embankment. The only thing to do was to take all the labour off the main earthwork

and put it on to throwing up a small three-foot bank some hundred yards away from the big bund to keep the earth dry for working. Once again we did this on our own responsibility, and it shows how well our improvised organisation was working by now that in one day we threw up twenty thousand feet, or four miles, of this protective bank, from the Shaiba end of the bund back to chainage 30,000. Pollard wanted to finish it next day, but the Irrigation Officer thought it unnecessary and told him to put the men back to the main earthwork. The result was that our new camp at chainage 11,000 was flooded out, and a long strip of what we had wanted to keep dry was soaked and remained wet until the casual water was joined by seepage water from the real flood under the unfinished bank. This part of the bund was consequently not finished to full section until the end of May, long after the real flood had come down, and was very nearly breached two or three times when the Shamál in its turn piled up the flood-water from the north.

I could not fight for my little bank, as I had a fall from my motor-cycle on the 9th April and broke a rib. This kept me at Magil, where all I could do was to fight as hard as I could to get a line of light railway run along the top of our bund, and also to get the military labour which had been working behind us all this time on the railway bund brought over to reinforce our gallant Arabs. In this I was unsuccessful, which was a pity, as, in spite of Pollard's repeated appeals, nothing had been done to revet the north face of the bund, and only a railway could have brought out in time the enormous quantity of mats and corrugated iron which was required to protect the soft sand from erosion.

On the 20th April the real Euphrates flood came down like a roaring lion upon the unrevetted toe of the bund and ate away hundreds of thousands of cubic feet of earthwork in less than a week. This was the last straw. I almost wept when I went out and saw poor Pollard struggling manfully to peg in mats and brushwood along the ten-mile face of the rapidly crumbling bund. What made it worse was to see the little train which might have saved us this last blow puffing uselessly towards Basrah and Zobeir along the unfinished railway embankment, where two or three thousand soldiers were still working away behind us at their own stretch of the old Euphrates bed. If the Shaiba Bund were once breached, the whole of their work would be wasted as well as ours, while if only it could be saved, the railway embankment could be finished at leisure. Luckily for us Sir George MacMunn took over as Inspector-General of Communications on the 25th April. One look at the bund was enough for him. He immediately agreed to give us all the military labour from the railway bund and to have a line of light railway laid along our poor mutilated old friend. Revetting materials were rushed out at once and the bund was saved at the eleventh hour. At this stage I was taken away from Magil altogether, so that I do not know what further difficulties had to be encountered, but I went out one day in May and took a last look at the scene of my adventures from the engine of a train which crawled delicately along to chainage 11,000. By that time the face of the bund was revetted not merely with mats, but with sheets of corrugated iron. The flood-water was being dashed against this by the fierce Shamál, and thrown up in great



breakers like the Atlantic Ocean. On my right, as far as the eye could reach, was a great expanse of hungry water broken only by the half-submerged date-palms which marked the site of McElwaine's first camp. Before me stretched the unbroken line of the barrier we had succeeded in putting up against such heavy odds, and safe behind it the level plain was dotted with tents and encampments, and covered with men and vehicles of every kind, which moved serenely and unconsciously about their lawful occasions.

While the bund was being finished, I was busy with my other work at Magil, which lay five miles upstream of Basrah, and quite close to the starting-point of the Shaiba Bund. Here the Shatt al Arab is deeper than at Basrah, and the deep water runs close under the right bank, allowing the largest ocean steamers to tie up alongside. This made Magil the ideal site for the Base supply depot, and for the terminus of the railway whose construction was just beginning. My chief duty was to make an estimate of the cost of acquiring the area for the military authorities, but I was also in general political charge of the district. This kept me in contact with my friend the Haji, who was Mudir of one of my sub-districts, and it was in his reception tent that I first attended a ceremonial Arab meal as conducted in Iraq. It was held to set the seal on the formal reconciliation, by payment of blood-money, of two families which had been at enmity for years, and the Haji had made special efforts to produce a repast worthy of the occasion. Just opposite me, where I sat cross-legged on the ground, was a whole calf's head, leering at me with glassy eyes. To my disgust the Haji leant forward, plucked out one of

these vile jellies and made as if to thrust it into my mouth. When I recoiled in horror, he said, "Dost thou not eat eyes, my dear? With us, they are the choicest of delicacies," and he popped them both into his own mouth.

On the 29th April the long series of attempts to relieve Kut al Amara culminated in the surrender of the garrison. A few days after, I met again in the Political mess at Basrah the young archæologist whose acquaintance I had made at Carchemish three years before. The negotiations between Sir Henry McMahon and the Sherif of Mecca were at this time still in progress, and the Arab revolt had not yet taken active shape, so that Lawrence had nothing to tell us about Arab operations. He was now a Captain, working in the Intelligence branch of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force at Cairo, and had been sent across to Mesopotamia with Aubrey Herbert in the hope that Khalil Pasha might be open to negotiation and withdraw from Kut, but the mission had been unsuccessful, and they were returning to Egypt, after arranging for an exchange of wounded and prisoners. Lawrence was already suffering from that passion of contempt for the regular army which was to attract certain politicians in later years almost as much as it always repelled soldiers, but the time for its sublimation into glorious irregularity had not yet come. The result of this, and of the fact that the mission upon which he was engaged was disapproved of in Basrah, was that he was not very popular in Mesopotamia, and an antagonism sprang up between him and the military authorities there which was to have serious effects on British policy in the Middle East. I have sometimes thought that the subsequent

conflict between the views on the future of the Arab countries which were held at the headquarters of the Egyptian and Mesopotamia Expeditionary Forces was to some extent due to the circumstances in which Lawrence paid his only visit to Mesopotamia proper. If only he and A. T. Wilson had met on this occasion and got to know each other well, all might have been different : but they did not meet.

I was myself a little disappointed with Lawrence, whose undisguised criticism of the Army, and especially of the Indian Army, hurt me the more, as I was not in a position, owing to my temporary removal from it, to fight its battles as I should have liked to do. Soon after he left Basrah, I had the great pleasure of seeing two hundred of my own men, who had been in a composite Mahratta battalion in the Kut relief force. Their officers told me that they had done magnificently, and that on one occasion, when they had to come back out of flooded trenches under very heavy fire, the officers of the composite Black Watch and Seaforth battalion, which had been covering their retirement, came forward spontaneously to express the admiration felt by all ranks for their coolness and steadiness. It warmed my heart to hear of this, and also to read in Edmund Candler's article on the Mahratta that the men of the Norfolks spoke of the Mahrattas as men " who would not leave you up a tree—not likely ! " In the same article he mentioned that before the war no one had taken the British officers of Mahratta battalions seriously when they expressed confidence in their men, and I took the opportunity of its republication in the *Basrah Times* to get Mrs. Lorimer, who was editing the paper, to add two doggerel verses as a pendant to the article.

The spirit of the men is shown by the following letter, which the Indian officers asked me to send to the 117th Mahrattas in captivity :

After greetings. " Our reason for writing is that we wish to tell you that we cannot find words to express our pride in the manner in which you have served the Government on the field of battle for the last year and a half. Nor indeed could our paper hold it all. For this reason all Mahrattas admire you greatly. We have been trying hard to meet you since January, but owing to certain difficulties we took a little too long over it. You must not think of this. All of us, of all classes, with no thought of our own lives, will by God's grace meet you as soon as possible. We shall not sleep till we have seen you again. We are all agreed on this. Meanwhile you must eat and drink and get strong. God will grant us a meeting soon. To all our friends and to all British officers, Indian officers, non-commissioned officers and brave soldiers we send best greetings."

The Turks had promised to deliver one letter for each prisoner of war if written in French and left open, but I cannot discover that this letter was ever received by those for whom it was intended.

Soon after the fall of Kut, I was appointed Assistant Political Officer, Basrah, and again found myself in Basrah City, where I had been before I was sent to the Shaiba Bund. When Sir Percy Cox sent for me and told me that he wanted me to take over this post I asked at once that I might be allowed to set myself up in Basrah City, two miles up the creek, and not live and work, as my predecessor had done, in the Headquarters Office at Ashar, on the banks of the Shatt al Arab. My reason for this was that I was afraid my style might

be rather cramped if I merely sat at a subordinate desk in the building which housed such a personality as A. T. Wilson. I admired him immensely, and liked him personally, but he was a great centraliser, and I have always felt that actual physical separation is a great factor in any scheme of decentralisation. With the best will in the world a man is much more likely to interfere with the work of his subordinate if he is sitting in the same building than he is if they are one or two miles apart. Sir Percy Cox at once agreed, and A. T. could only conform, though he did not much like it. When I asked him for the files of correspondence relating to my work, he said that he would gladly lend me the previous papers on any subject as and when necessary, but that he could not allow them to leave the office. He was one of those natural lovers of *paperasserie* who take a pride in multiplying files and beating the record number of despatches and telegrams sent out from his office. The disappearance from his Registry of all the Basrah files would have caused him real pain, and I did not insist, as I knew very well that within a few weeks I should have borrowed them all, and I had no intention of sending any back. I remember looking in at his office a few days after I had set up my own, and finding him in full cry, dashing through an enormous pile of waiting papers and disposing of them one after another like a thrashing machine. I thought he was looking a bit green, but we discussed our business, whatever it was, and then began talking. Looking at the mass of papers, he said, "Babu's job this, isn't it? But I feel that I'm doing three men's work." "I know you do," I said, "but you never consider what the three men think

about it." He did not answer at once, but called the *farrash* and told him to bring a basin. He then lay down on his bedding, which was in a corner of the office, and asked me to go out for a moment. A few minutes later he called me in again, and explained that he had just been sick, and when I left him he was at it again as hard as ever.

## CHAPTER IV

### REGATTAS (NASIRIYAH, 1916)

Transfer to Nasiriyah. Attitude of Iraqis towards British rule. A typical Euphrates town. Mizher Pasha. Punitive expedition up-river. Getting hold of the Sheikh. Second expedition. Hamud as Swet. Fly-boats. Bedouin co-operation. Hamud's V.C. Guns. Nasiriyah Mounted Guard. Captain H. R. P. Dickson. Local councils. General Post

At the beginning of August I was again transferred, this time to Nasiriyah, on the Euphrates, where an Indian Division guarded the only line other than that of the Tigris by which the Turks in Baghdad could attack Basrah. This was the line by which they had advanced upon Shaiba in 1915, but they had now withdrawn all their regular forces to the other river, leaving only a few tiny garrisons and isolated officials to keep the Arabs hostile to us. Not that the tribes were any too fond of the Turks, especially on the Lower Euphrates, where the formidable confederacy of the Muntafiq had for years resisted their authority, and refused to pay more than nominal taxes. It was, however, only natural that in the areas where the Turkish occupation was maintained, however lightly, the tribal chiefs should do lip-service to their old masters, and put obstacles in the way of any advance of the British invaders. On the other hand, it could not be assumed that in the areas where British occupation was established the tribes would at once become pro-British. The attitude of the Iraqis towards British rule remained substantially as it had been reported in 1878 :

“To exchange the yoke of the Sultan for that of the British would not be regarded by the Arab-speaking population of this country as a misfortune, but rather the reverse : and it is the opinion of men who have had abundant opportunities of forming a correct judgment that no one not actually an official or a soldier would raise a finger to prevent such a consummation. But it is quite another question whether, the exchange once made, the nomadic Arab population would long willingly submit to be ruled by Kaffirs, especially when acted upon from without by accomplished intriguers.”—Geary’s *Through Asiatic Turkey*, vol. i, pp. 273-4.

It must be remembered, too, that our withdrawal to, and subsequent surrender of, Kut al Amara had thrown grave doubts upon the ability of the British to retain what they had won. The Muntafiq tribes of Nasiriyah and Suq ash Sheyukh were not at all sure that the British occupation of the Lower Euphrates would not turn out to be as transitory as that of Kut al Amara. Tales of the treatment meted out by the Turks to the Arabs of Kut after General Townshend’s surrender had already reached Nasiriyah by the time I got there, and it was not to be wondered at if the Euphrates tribes hesitated to throw in their lot with a new master who might at any moment disappear, leaving them to the mercy of their own lawful rulers. It will be seen that the job of the Political officers with the Euphrates Division was more delicate than that of those at Basrah or even on the Tigris, where the bulk of the British force was interposed between the tribes and the Turkish authorities upstream. At Nasiriyah itself, which was force-head on the Euphrates, the



only unusual feature was the presence of two river gunboats and the stern-wheeled paddle-boat in which I had come up across the Hammar Lake from Basrah.

My work at Nasiriyah was much more exciting than what I had had to do at Basrah. The Turks had no garrison on the Euphrates nearer than Samawa, seventy miles upstream, but they had left an administrative official at Shatra, on the River Hai, which comes down from Kut al Amara on the Tigris and loses itself in the swamps of the Hammar Lake. This official, an old man called Mizher Pasha, was of more use to the Turks than any number of battalions. He sat all alone at Shatra, half-way between the British forces on the Tigris and the Euphrates, and by his resolute attitude, clever propaganda, and occasional gifts of money kept all the sheikhs of the Muntafiq on tenterhooks, and prevented them from throwing in their lot with the invaders. He was well out of reach of both the British forces, since the country along the Hai was difficult and the tribes really formidable, having surrounded and badly cut up a whole Indian brigade which had sallied out on a punitive expedition in the Shatra direction a few months before I reached Nasiriyah. I was told that the same tribes had even made short work of a Turkish division some years before the War, and the occupation of the Hai and Shatra would have meant tying up a very large force which was needed elsewhere. The only way to sterilise Mizher Pasha was by counter-propaganda, and this meant interminable interviews with crafty tribesmen who went backwards and forwards between him and me, getting all they could out of both of us and remaining equally

disloyal to the British and the Turks. Not that they really mattered very much so long as we retained our force at Sheikh Saad on the Tigris ; but if we had suffered a serious reverse and been compelled to withdraw towards Amara, they would have become a real danger. The same applied to the tribes on the Euphrates itself towards Samawa, but they were not quite so inaccessible, since the river was navigable by the "fly-boats," as the gunboats were called (from their being named after different species of fly), and occasional upstream regattas were organised to keep them in order.

I was sent up with one of these regattas soon after I joined the Euphrates Division. One of the gunboats had been treacherously fired upon from the village of Abu Risha when returning from a trip up-river through ostensibly friendly country. Abu Risha was seventy miles upstream and it was out of the question for the Division to occupy it permanently, but this unfriendly act could not be left unpunished. The responsible Arab sheikh, who lived on the opposite bank of the river at a place called Daraji, was summoned to Headquarters to explain his misdemeanour, but not unnaturally declined to put his head into the lion's jaws. The General decided to show him that the arm of the great British Government was long enough to reach him, and ordained a regatta with the object of bringing him in. Two battalions, one of British Territorials and the other of Gurkhas, were accordingly embarked in two paddle-steamers, and sent off up-river one night, escorted front and rear by two fly-boats. The Territorials were to land on the right bank and "chastise" Abu Risha, while the Political Officer, escorted by the Gurkhas, was to

advance on Daraji and do his best to induce the Sheikh to give himself up. Daraji village itself was not to be "chastised," as it had not been guilty of the crime of Abu Risha, and strict orders were issued that it was not to be fired upon unless the villagers opposed the British advance.

The bearded Captain of the leading fly-boat, which was of course the flagship, asked me to come with him in the first place to make sure that he went to the right spot, and also to parley with any Arabs who might turn up, and tell him who were friends and who were enemies. These fly-boats were really little more than floating gun-platforms, with a twelve-pounder in the bows and a four-inch gun aft. They were manned by the Royal Navy and flew the white ensign, but on the Euphrates at any rate they had no chance of manœuvring and could only go straight up and down the river, whose channel was so narrow that they could not always be sure even of turning round. They were by no means invulnerable, but their armour-plating resisted a rifle bullet at all but point-blank range, and we did not expect to come up against guns.

We arrived at dawn at the place two miles downstream of Daraji where the Gurkha battalion was to disembark, and I was put ashore with one Arab scout to wait for their steamer, which was a mile or so behind. The Captain offered to wait until it came up, but there was no sign of life on the bank, and I said that I should be all right if he and the Territorials went on. Hardly had they left me when I heard a distant war-chant, and peering through the grass at the top of the steep river-bank I saw a party of Arab horsemen riding towards me. They had no doubt seen the masts of the four

steamers and were coming to investigate. My companion crawled up to join me, and at once made as if to fire on them, but I restrained him forcibly and pulled him down under cover of the bank, for the Gurkhas were still a long way downstream, and it seemed to me unwise to advertise our presence unnecessarily. The Arabs cantered nearer and nearer until they were only a few hundred yards away, and I was just wondering whether I had not better jump in and swim to the opposite bank, when a machine-gun on the approaching steamer put a beautiful belt right into the middle of them at a range of just under a mile, and they turned and rode away.

As soon as the steamer came up, the Gurkhas landed and advanced across the river-bend in attack formation towards the distant village of Daraji. Meanwhile the other steamer went on round the bend and landed the Territorials on the opposite bank for the chastisement of Abu Risha. Grim stories were afterwards told of this operation, which was almost too successful for the kindly hearts of the British troops engaged. Not that the villagers did not deserve their fate, for they had treacherously fired upon one of His Majesty's ships at a time when they were professedly friendly to the British, and they fired again without provocation upon the advancing Territorials, but they made a poor show when it came to the bayonet, and the proportion of casualties was so unequal that it was hardly reckoned a fight at all. We had no real fighting on our side of the river either, but it was not very pleasant. Riding about on our right flank and retiring before us were little troops of Arab horsemen who fired at us continuously, while white-

smocked footmen, taking cover in the nullahs and behind tussocks of river-grass, sniped the advancing line with a will. It was like an exciting field-day at first, and when the little Gurkha on my left sat down with a surprised look on his face and a small dark spot in the centre of his forehead, I felt an insane desire to sound the Cease Fire and explain that there had been an accident.

Outside the walls and on the flat mud roofs of the village of Daraji, which had been warned not to join in the shooting, was a swarm of Arabs watching the advance. It was clear that they could not be expected to let the battalion come right up to the village without some excitable person letting off his rifle, so I asked the C.O. to call a halt. Choosing four Gurkhas as a personal escort to uphold my dignity, and waving a signalling flag to reassure the villagers, I walked forward to demand that the Sheikh should give himself up. Away beyond the fringe of palm trees which lined the river-bank the guns of the two fly-boats and the machine-guns of the Territorials showed, by their steady firing, that Abu Risha was being duly chastised. An occasional droning buzz or the vicious whirr of a ricochet from my right reminded me of my own more immediate neighbours, but the steady fire of the Gurkhas, who were now all lying down under cover, kept them at a distance. When we got to within about two hundred yards of the village, I stood still and waved my flag. Not without considerable hesitation three or four frightened Arabs came out to speak to me.

"Tell the Sheikh I want to see him," I said as firmly as I could. My four little orderlies had fixed bayonets and closed round me protectingly.

"The Sheikh awaits you," said the leading villager. "Coffee is prepared in his guest-house, and he invites your honour to come and partake of it."

I replied that this was not good enough; the Sheikh must come out and greet me outside the village in correct Arab style, or the village would be attacked. After some five or ten minutes the villagers came back with a man who was supposed to be the Sheikh, but he did not look very sheikhly, and something in their manner told me that he was not the man, so I sent them back again. I then sat down and lit a cigarette, which was more than half smoked before the trembling Sheikh appeared, but there was no doubt this time, and I handed him over to my trusty four, who escorted him back through the battalion to the steamer, where he was safely stowed away. Desultory firing was still going on between the Gurkhas and the Arab skirmishers, but the village was completely cowed, and a company went forward without opposition and destroyed the Turkish telegraph office. Then we all retired in good order and embarked again without further casualties. The rest of the fleet was already waiting for us, and we sailed away downstream with our prisoner, who was put in charge of a Bedouin chief named Hamud as Swet, who had come with us on the expedition.

Thus ended my first appearance under fire. It is true that I had gone into action waving a white flag, but I was quite pleased with myself for having got hold of the Sheikh, and looked forward to a word of praise from the General. My disgust can be imagined when I was told next morning, as we were weighing anchor after tying up for the night, that Hamud as Swet had taken upon himself to let

the Sheikh go on a written guarantee that he would behave himself in future.

A few weeks later I was in another up-river regatta of a rather different kind, and had my first experience of combined operations between Bedouin Arabs and regular forces. The Turks had taken alarm at our cutting-out expedition and had sent down a small force to occupy Al Ain, a village just upstream of Daraji. There they were joined by Ajaimi Pasha of the great Sa'dun family, an Iraqi who had taken a prominent part in the battle of Shaiba and again in the defence of Nasiriyah when it was first occupied by British forces. Ajaimi was always spoken of with some awe by the Arab tribesmen, some of whom hated him for the past misdoings of himself and his family, and others had a sneaking fondness for him and would be quite ready to join him again, as they did at Shaiba, if the Turks seemed to be winning. Among those who professed to hate him were the Bedouin tribes that lived in the desert beyond Ur of the Chaldees, and were based for supplies upon Nasiriyah. A certain number of these tribes had chosen quite early to throw in their lot with the infidel invader, whose purse was well known to be bottomless, and whose representatives were said to believe almost anything they were told. Notable among these far-seeing vultures of the desert was our friend Hamud as Swet, chief of the Dhafir tribe, who had been responsible for the escape of the Sheikh of Daraji. His tribal pasture lay along the stretch of the Euphrates which was in British hands, and he thought it better to keep in with us on that account. God alone knew which side would ultimately be victorious. The Turks had taken Kut al Amara, but British

and Indian reinforcements were pouring into the country, and it was wise to be prepared. Why not offer to lead the Dhafir against Ajaimi, and thus curry favour with the British? There was no real danger in this, for there would of course be no need for Arab blood to be shed, nor indeed for the tribe to commit itself unnecessarily. Since the Turks at Al Ain were reported to have guns, the support of a gunboat would be necessary, and if all went well the Dhafir cavalry and camelry might well be trusted to occupy the village, once the naval guns had cleared it of the enemy. This might give them an opportunity of paying off local scores against the villagers, as well as of getting some inexpensive loot.

Fired with this resolve, Hamud mounted his camel and rode down to Basrah, without saying a word to me, and the first we heard of his visit was an order from G.H.Q. for a combined attack on Al Ain. I had some difficulty in persuading the General that I was not responsible for this idea, and he only agreed that the fly-boats should co-operate on the distinct understanding that the Dhafir would really attack Ajaimi, and that the Central Indian battalion which went with them as escort was not to take any part in the attack.

Once again we stole away up the river, but with a more important quarry this time, for it would be a great feather in our caps if we could manage to round up Ajaimi himself. The stream was running strongly, and we crept very slowly round the bend of the river, as we had to keep our small flotilla of two fly-boats and one stern-wheeler well together. The first rendezvous was the village of Batha, twenty miles upstream of Nasiriyah, but when we anchored there for the night there was no sign of Hamud. A



messenger rode up to us to say that he had started and would soon be well ahead of us, but it was not till the next evening, when we anchored again within five miles of Daraji, that his force at last appeared. Three or four hundred camels advancing in crescent formation, each carrying two riders, were preceded by a small body of horsemen who formed the *corps d'élite*. One of these horsemen was dressed in bright scarlet, which we were told was a sign that he was a hero who had won his spurs in some tribal affray, probably by actually engaging one of the enemy, instead of riding furiously round them at a safe distance and firing his rifle into the air. We called him Hamud's V.C.

We held a midnight conference on board the flagship and decided that Hamud should march off at dawn with his whole force and attack Al Ain. The fly-boats and the stern-wheeler were to allow enough time for him to get well ahead and then to follow him upstream and support him with artillery fire. I have already explained that a gunboat on either of the two great rivers of Mesopotamia was a singularly vulnerable fighting unit. She had a very small crew and could not afford more than two or three casualties without being put out of action, while her armour was proof only against rifle and machine-gun fire at a respectable range, and one direct hit from a field-gun might have made her useless. Her real function in combined operations such as these was to bring guns much nearer the firing-line than would be possible on land, but she was never meant to work like a tank in the forefront of the battle. On this particular occasion our fly-boats were merely acting in support of Hamud, to whom the land operations had been entrusted,

but Hamud had no intention whatever of becoming involved in real fighting. His force showed considerable reluctance to start ahead of the fly-boats at all, and did not in fact set out until some hours after dawn. We then gave him a fair start and cast off in pursuit. The banks were very high along this reach of the river, and it was only by climbing up to the little platform on the mast which held the range-finder that one could see anything at all. As the three boats crawled round the bends we listened anxiously for the outbreak of hostilities, and kept a look out on the right bank, where Hamud was supposed to be operating. Another friendly sheikh had undertaken to guard our right flank on the left bank of the river, which was not the dangerous one, as the Sheikh of Daraji was not expected to risk falling into disfavour again.

Looking over the river-grass, through which I had peered on my lonely trip some weeks before, I could see some distant horsemen galloping along parallel to the river, who were presumably our right flank guard. Knowing what I did of the uncertainty of tribal co-operation, I was by no means confident that a sudden burst of firing might not break out at any moment from the undergrowth at a range of a hundred yards. This fear was present all through the operations, and I could not help wondering what we should do if it were to happen. Navigation on the Euphrates is a tricky business, and if we were attacked where the channel was narrow, we might have some difficulty in extricating ourselves. I suppose that we should have lain as snug as we could behind the bulwarks while the stern-wheeler landed a force behind us to clear the bank, but this would have taken some time, and a

chance bullet or two might in the meanwhile knock out our navigator and helmsman and result in our running ashore.

We naturally thought that our left flank at any rate was quite safe, since Hamud and his imposing army must be all round Al Ain by now, but to our great astonishment, when we rounded a bend a mile below the village, we found his whole army huddled together behind a low sandy ridge, well out of sight and range of the enemy, whom they had clearly no intention of attacking. Our hopes began to fall, as it was getting late, and we should soon have to be turning back to get into safety by nightfall. Our plan was to spend the night at Batha, and if this was Bedouin co-operation our right flank would be in the air on the return journey.

I climbed up into the crow's-nest with a megaphone and shouted a few words of encouragement to our faint-hearted ally.

"Y'Allah Hamud!" I cried, "Y'Allah! Where are the warriors of the Dhafir? Forward, sons of the Arab! God strengthen you! God give you victory! Give me a fleet horse and I will accompany you [which I had not the smallest intention of doing]. Hold not back from the fray, O doughty warriors. The eyes of the mighty British Government are upon you!"

Stung into action by these exhortations, a little band flung themselves recklessly forward. Conspicuous among them was Hamud's V.C., many horses' lengths ahead, a scarlet and tragic figure. We crept forward a little more, dropped anchor, and began to shell the village, while behind us the stern-wheeler tied up to the right bank and disembarked a small force as a *point d'appui* for Hamud.

They also posted some machine-guns to guard the fly-boats against an attack from the other bank, on to which they could not bring their guns to bear. Immediately the first gun fired there was a commotion in the village. Little figures ran or rode backwards and forwards, and quite a respectable musketry fire was turned on to Hamud and ourselves. Seeing that he needed further encouragement, we weighed anchor after we had fired a few rounds, and nosed cautiously upstream, firing as we went.

We were now easily within effective rifle range of the village, and shots rattled thick and fast on our steel hide. Crouched along the scuppers was a motley jumble of staff officers, signalmen, sailors, and Arab sheikhs, of whom two or three were always given seats at up-river regattas to ensure their tribes not joining the enemy. The gun-layer of the forward twelve-pounder used it just like a shotgun, and made some beautiful shooting. On one occasion he bracketed and actually bowled over a solitary horseman who was riding across from the village to a little mud fort about a quarter of a mile away from the river-bank.

It soon became painfully clear that Hamud was not going to attack the village, which was more strongly held than we had imagined, though the Turkish guns were fortunately a myth. The essence of the scheme had been an unexpected swoop of mounted Arabs on to the village at daybreak, supported by the guns of the fly-boats, but Hamud's dilatory tactics had given the enemy ample warning of our approach, and a surprise was now out of the question. After some deliberation the officer commanding the force decided not to take on the busi-

ness himself. He rightly said that his orders were to co-operate with Hamud, not to conduct an attack on his own, and he obviously had no chance of taking the village in broad daylight with his small dismounted force. So we retired round the bend again, and told our ally that we proposed to abandon the attack, and that he must retire at the same time and keep in close touch with us.

As soon as he had begun to withdraw, the Indians re-embarked and the flotilla had just made off downstream, with the flagship bringing up the rear, when one of our Arab passengers took me excitedly by the arm and cried "Uddoo ! Uddoo !" (enemy). I looked where he was pointing and saw a small cloud of Ajaimi's horsemen riding out from behind the village to attack Hamud. The gunner at the twelve-pounder had been firing at the village down a reach of the river along which he had been able to lay direct, but the horsemen were rapidly coming abreast of us and the bank was too high for him to fire at them over it. I suggested to the skipper that we might fire blindly over the bank to frighten them, and he swung round the big four-inch gun in the stern, elevated it to its highest angle and blazed across. From the crow's-nest I could not see the burst, which was probably four or five miles away, but the horsemen checked at the unexpected noise and we gained a few precious minutes. Meanwhile the bank got steeper and steeper, until it was impossible to fire over it at all, and the strong current swept us down at such a tremendous pace that we began to leave Hamud behind. Every now and then I caught a glimpse of the long line of camels trotting jerkily away as fast as they could, with their long necks

bobbing up and down, and their two riders in the extremity of agitation and terror. Most of the faster-moving Dhafir horsemen had no false shame about outstripping their slower comrades, but Hamud's V.C. and seven others stayed behind to charge the enemy. We heard afterwards that they were all killed. Our own share in the inglorious retreat was confined to looking on helplessly, for even if we had cast anchor we could have done nothing to help, and should only have run the risk of being fired down upon from the high bank, and possibly of running aground when we eventually tried to turn and make off again.

As we watched, we saw two men slip off their camel into the long grass, and in a few moments they appeared stark naked on the narrow strip of sand at the foot of the bank. For some hundreds of yards they ran along behind us imploring us to pick them up, but we were in a particularly dangerous part of the stream, and the skipper said that it was out of the question to stop. While I was trying to explain this to them, a small party of horsemen appeared behind them on the top of the bank. "Uddoo! Uddoo!" said my Arab friend. I pushed my way to a machine-gun, shoved the gunner aside, and gave them a burst, which had the effect of heading them off and giving the two breathless nuditities time to collect themselves. Seeing that we were not going to pick them up, they took the obvious and sensible step of swimming the river, and eventually found their way home unhurt.

Our prestige was sadly damaged by this adventure. Hamud's only casualties were the V.C. and his seven companions, but he spread the story

that we had let him down badly, and this was generally believed at fireside gatherings. As a matter of fact we could hardly have acted differently unless we were prepared to risk one of his Majesty's ships, which the skipper did not feel called upon to do in the circumstances, and who shall blame him? Our real mistake was in believing these particular Bedouin to be fighting men, and being deceived by their boastful promises, and I confess that my first impression of the Bedouin as a fighting man was most unfavourable. I remembered my Arnaut friend in Macedonia having told me that the Albanian irregulars were terrified by the Servian guns, and I quite understood that it would have been useless to expect tribal irregulars to advance against guns without artillery support. I could even have forgiven Hamud for holding back until he was quite sure that the fly-boats would use their guns, if he had only done something afterwards. But I was thoroughly disgusted with him for letting his V.C. be killed and behaving so badly himself, especially when it turned out that the Turks had no guns after all.

I turned with relief to the Nasiriyah Mounted Guard, a small quasi-regular force which I had been allowed to raise, partly, it must be acknowledged, as a counterblast to the body of Arab scouts which had been raised by the Division under the control of my friend Eadie, the Intelligence officer. The Arab scouts were mostly sons of local sheikhs, and while their province was theoretically to obtain military intelligence, it was inevitable that they should encroach to some extent upon the Political sphere. I enlisted my mounted guard not from the tribesmen, but from townsmen and cultivators, for I

have always had a feeling that the cultivator makes a better soldier than the tribesman, in spite of the glamour that is always shed upon any really wild man. He is more dependable and far less independent, and it stands to reason that if you want a large number of men to behave in a way which is against their natural inclination, in conditions where the personal supervision of an officer cannot always be exercised, you had much better choose men who are amenable to discipline and not too wild or independent. They were put into uniform and strictly disciplined by a British non-commissioned officer, Corporal Hall of the 5th Queen's, who stayed with them for years after I had left Nasiriyah, and became one of the first officers of the Arab Levies into which my guard was afterwards merged. Their titular commander was Hezam al Mishari, a member of the Sa'dun family, who remains in my memory chiefly from the fact that the first time he ever held a polo-stick in his hand he galloped the whole length of the field hitting the ball hard and true until it went between the goal posts.

Apart from the two regattas which I have already described, we had a fairly peaceful time while I was at Nasiriyah. The General did sally forth on one occasion with practically the whole division to chastise someone or other, but the Muntafiq put up a strong resistance and were not very much impressed. I was with the Divisional Staff on a small mound, watching a brigade advancing upon a rebellious village, when I suddenly saw two armed Arabs galloping full pelt towards us from behind. "Look out, sir!" I shouted to the General, who remained quite unmoved, though some of the Staff fingered their revolvers and looked a little alarmed, but



there was great laughter when my two armed Arabs turned out to be two of Eadie's scouts coming with a message from the Military Governor.

Sir Percy Cox left us all a free hand in those early days, and so long as we kept our accounts properly and did not get into trouble with the military, we could do more or less what we liked. My nearest neighbour, Captain H. R. P. Dickson, at Suq ash Sheyukh, surrounded by armed tribes and some way from military support, maintained British authority by sheer force of personality. When he and two or three other neighbours came and stayed with me at Christmas it was interesting to compare notes, and to see how each of us had dealt with the various problems that were more or less common to the Euphrates districts. Dickson had an amusing story of his first efforts to collect revenue from the sheikhs of Suq ash Sheyukh. The Turks had either taken away or destroyed all the administrative records when they retreated, and it was not easy to find out what each man should pay. The properties consisted largely of date-gardens bordering the network of streams and canals into which the Euphrates splits up before it enters the marshes, and it was of course impossible for any Political officer, in those days, to go round and inspect them. Dickson thought he had better start by asking the sheikhs straight out what they used to pay to the Turks, and accepting this figure until it was in some way proved to be inaccurate. The first sheikh he approached in this way was lordly and bland. "By God, O Duxon, I know not," he said. "Rot," said Dickson, "of course you know quite well. Now how many trees did you pay on in 1914?" "By your head, mine eyes, I know not," repeated

the sheikh. "Write fifteen hundred!" So Dickson wrote fifteen hundred and collected the tax. A few days later, an informer brought him a Turkish receipt, made out in favour of this same sheikh, which showed that he had paid on five thousand trees. On this, Dickson sent for the sheikh again and asked him to explain. The sheikh looked puzzled. "Five thousand, sayest thou, my dear? By God, it is very strange!" Then, with a burst of magnanimity he said, "Y'Allah! Write six thousand, my friend. Let us not quarrel," and there the matter rested. Some months later, when Dickson had made great friends with this sheikh, he asked him one evening, as man to man, how many trees he really owned. "Wallahi," said the sheikh, "God alone knoweth—but there cannot be less than ninety thousand."

The ordinary Iraqi tribesman is rather proud of a succession of lies like this, and utters them with a frank smile that would deceive an archangel. He does not in the least mind being caught out, if you ever do catch him out, but rather respects you for it as a better player of the game. How he knows when his fellow Iraqi is lying I have no idea, but I soon found that it was better to leave it to him to try, and I formed two councils, one of sheikhs to try tribal cases, and one of mixed composition to try cases where townsmen and tribesmen were both involved. The first of these bodies became a kind of advisory council to myself whenever I had to approach the tribes about anything particular. They used to come and sit in my office, "schlooping" their coffee and smoking cigarette after cigarette of the local make, which were so loosely rolled that the glowing end almost always fell off and burned a neat

round hole in carpet or white pyjamas. When this happened the sheikh concerned would rise hurriedly and slap himself as if he were killing a wasp, after which he would sit down again quite happily and light another cigarette. Our favourite subject of conversation was Mizher Pasha, at Shatra, whom they called the "poor old man." "Hast thou heard the latest tale of the poor old man?" one would ask. "Sheikh Khayyun went to see him yesterday, to demand more rifles, and the wretch was so terrified that he shut himself up in the house of honour and sat there for three hours, not daring to come out." But our meetings usually resolved themselves into committees to decide on tribal action which was required by the General. This usually took the form of collecting local supplies or providing labour for the various depots or for building up the flood embankments. My experience on the Shaiba Bund was useful to me here, and I was kept very busy arranging for quotas of men to work under the supervision of the C.R.E. There was always great difficulty about rates of pay for earthwork, and on one occasion all the sheikhs complained that their men were being asked to dig more cubic feet of earth in a day than any human being could possibly be expected to do. I knew that this was all nonsense, but no amount of calculation convinced the sheikhs, and I suddenly decided to try my luck at a practical demonstration. Leading them to the small courtyard round which my house was built, I asked them to put their heads together and decide how many men could dig it out in one day to the depth of a *mis'hah* blade, which was exactly twelve inches, measured up to the cross-bar on which the digger set his foot. After

a long discussion they agreed that three men could do it comfortably. Rather anxiously I then paced one side of the square and found that it was nineteen feet long, giving three hundred and sixty-one square feet for the three men to dig. This meant that each man could do one-third of a cubic foot more than the one hundred and twenty which were demanded of him. What I should have done if the calculation had come out wrong I really do not know !

Towards the end of January 1917 a bomb-shell arrived at Nasiriyah in the shape of a circular telegram from the Chief Political Officer ordering Philby to Amara, on the Tigris, as Assistant Political Officer, Howell from Amara to Nasiriyah to relieve me, myself to Suq ash Sheyukh to relieve Dickson, and Dickson to the Supply and Transport Corps to help with local purchase. This last transfer was given as the reason for a series of moves which involved suddenly changing four officers who were beginning to know their work, and the order caused great consternation on the Euphrates, whatever it may have done on the Tigris. Dickson and I were both very happy where we were, and did not at all like moving, but there was no help for it, and as he was said to be urgently required for his new job I went down at once to Suq to take over from him. I shall never forget walking round his domain with him that first evening. I had never myself adopted the ordinary Moslem salutation of *Salamun aleikum*, which I had been told no Christian or Jew should use for fear of a rude reply, but Dickson used it to everyone and was greeted in return with shouts of "*Waleikum as salam*, ya Duxon," from his smiling charges. They were so

heart-broken at losing him that all the sheikhs stole off to Basrah by river and besieged Sir Percy Cox, declaring that they would not return to Suq without their Duxon. In the end Sir Percy sent for me to Basrah and asked if I would mind taking Dickson's place, and going to the Supply and Transport to help with the formation of a new Local Produce Department. To this I rather reluctantly agreed.

## CHAPTER V

### RESOURCES (BAGHDAD, 1917)

Local Produce Department. Colonel E. Dickson. Baghdad. Supply problems. Tour of Middle Euphrates. Haji Atteya abu Gullal. Museyib. Kerbela. Najaf. Kifil. Hillah. General impressions. General Maude's proclamation. Buying barley at Museyib and Hillah. General Maude's weekly meetings. Dates at Basrah

WHEN I got back to Basrah, early in February 1917, General Maude was completing his preparations for the advance upon Baghdad. Foreseeing that his line of communications would be doubled in length, and anxious to relieve his river fleet of as much transport as possible, he decided to make the fullest possible use of the resources of the country, and with this object to co-ordinate the work of the Local Purchase officers attached to the various units of the force, and bring them under one control. The officer chosen to organise the new Local Produce Department was Colonel E. Dickson, the Base Supply officer at Magil, and when I went to report to him I found myself within a few hundred yards of my old headquarters. The base at Magil had grown out of all knowledge during the nine months that had passed since I left it for Basrah. Solid wharves had been built for over a mile along the shore of the Shatt al Arab, alongside which great ocean steamers were continually discharging every variety of cargo. Huge sheds and dumps, connected by a network of railway sidings, thronged the date-gardens in which our tiny camp had been, and the whole five miles from Magil to

Basrah was one unbroken succession of huts, camps, dumps, and hospitals. The Shatt itself was crowded with the river-craft of the Mesopotamia Persia Steam Navigation Company, Thames pleasure steamers which had made their way out all round the Cape, steamers from the Hooghly and Irrawaddy, beautifully equipped hospital boats, fly-boats, barges, local sailing-vessels, and a whole fleet of brand-new steamers built specially for the campaign.

Colonel Dickson told me that he had been sending up a thousand tons of supplies a day for some time past, and that everything pointed to an early advance against the Turks on the Tigris. He was still handing over to his successor, and all we could do for the moment was to work out the lines upon which the new department should work. I found that he had made out a rough scheme which included practically all the economic and commercial activities of a civil administration, and I told him that Sir Percy Cox would certainly blue-pencil the whole thing if it were put up to him in that form. In any case it seemed to me unusual for a military department under the control of the Director of Supply and Transport to concern itself with such matters as imports and exports, revenue, and other forms of taxation. I could see that he was by no means convinced, but he quite agreed that we must confine ourselves for the present to ensure that the army got what it wanted locally, and put his scheme on one side.

In February General Maude began the series of operations which culminated on the 11th March in the capture of Baghdad, and a few days afterwards Colonel Dickson and I embarked in a

river steamer and made our way up the Tigris to join G.H.Q. at the capital. We stopped on the way at Qurna, Ali Gharbi, Amara, and Kut, setting our new plans on foot at each halt, and reached Baghdad about a week after it had been taken. As we steamed up the beautiful reach of the Tigris on which Baghdad is built, and which was spanned by a bridge of boats, I thought of the last time I had arrived there, hot and dusty after my twenty-mile walk, and remembered how little I had foreseen, when I drank my tea in Mrs. Lorimer's drawing-room that day, that only three and a half years later the Residency would be converted into the General Headquarters of a British army in the field.

The chief difference I noticed in the city was the broad street which Khalil Pasha, the Turkish commander, had driven like a gash through the crowded bazaars on the left bank. This street, which is still the main, if not the only thoroughfare in the city, passed right through the Residency grounds. It was unmetalled, and the flow of military traffic churned it on rainy days into a morass in which it was almost impossible to move. Except for this, and the throng of craft of all descriptions on the river, there was no great change in the city, the people having settled down at once to their ordinary life. Colonel Dickson and I were billeted in a nice old house on the left bank with a courtyard opening on the river, which we found very luxurious after the tent we had been sharing at Magil.

General Maude had behind him a five-hundred-mile line of communications, water-borne on the treacherous and shifting Tigris, which meant a three weeks' voyage from Basrah to Baghdad and back for the average laden steamer. He must



therefore, if he depended only upon his river communications, provide transport for just twenty times his daily needs. Every ton of grain that we could get for him would save him twenty of river-tonnage, and our first problem was to restore the flow of grain from the Euphrates areas, thirty miles away to the west, which had ceased with the British occupation. One result of the advance to Baghdad having followed the Tigris was that no British soldier had ever been seen on the Euphrates north of Nasiriyah, except for those occasional appearances a few miles upstream on regattas. The inhabitants of the grain-growing areas that are watered by the upper reaches of the Great River, and of the store-cities along their banks from which Baghdad had been supplied with grain, had no experience of British occupation. With the retirement of the Turks from Baghdad they had stopped sending in supplies. Nor was this surprising, since public security was non-existent. Government officials had disappeared, the Turkish police had melted away, and each petty sheikh was out for his own hand. Intertribal raids and skirmishes were of daily occurrence, while armed bands of marauders prowled the country in every direction, and were only too ready to loot the harmless wayfarer, especially if he travelled with laden beasts. The latent enmity between town and tribe had also sprung into flame with the removal of control, and the merchants in the market towns were far too anxious for the safety of their grain to let it leave the vaulted grain-stores. Another deterrent was their ignorance of British ways, and the fear that even if it escaped the dangers of the way, their precious stuff might be commandeered for little or no pay-

ment. Caravans were of course coming into Baghdad in increasing numbers, but there was not enough grain even to meet the normal requirements of the city, far less to supply our own military requirements.

The first step was to spy out the land, and to show the dwellers on the Euphrates that we were aware of their existence. It was out of the question to occupy the area with troops, since every unit was needed for the three covering advances which General Maude had set on foot, fan-wise, towards Kirkuk, Mosul, and Feluja, as soon as Baghdad was won, but he decided to send me on a tour to the most important centres, with another Political officer, Goldsmith, to report on the local resources and establish some form of political connection. I was to report to Sir Percy Cox and Colonel Dickson, and be as quick about it as I could.

We set off on the 5th April, under the escort of one of the four town sheikhs of the holy city of Najaf, Haji Atteya abu Gullal, who had been in constant communication with Sir Percy Cox since the occupation of Basrah, and had come in to make his submission in person as soon as Baghdad was taken. Goldsmith and I and the Haji, who had a small son on his knee, sat side by side in a crazy victoria, with a handful of armed retainers riding alongside, and a second carriage bringing up the rear with servants and luggage. Crossing the Iron Bridge which spans a canal some three miles west of Baghdad, we drove through a tangle of ancient canal-banks out into the open desert. There was no road, but the going was quite good enough, and we had no difficulty in reaching the small town of Museyib, on the Euphrates, the same afternoon. I

cannot do better than quote here from the reports I sent in at the time, as they were written while the impressions were fresh in my mind.

*April 5th, Museyib.*—Arrived here at 4 p.m. without trouble. Following are most important points noticed to-day :

Refugees are returning to Baghdad. We met about five parties averaging thirty each. Large proportion of women. We were held up at the following places by parties of tribesmen nominally guarding the road but actually plundering passers-by : Khan Chikwa, half an hour below Advanced Base ; Khan Azad, where some shots were fired in the air ; Shershubah ; and Khan al Bir.

The incident at Khan Azad was very funny, as Haji Atteya sprang out of the victoria the moment the first shot was fired, and advanced upon the marauders in great indignation. "I am Atteya abu Gullal," he shouted. "I am the Sheikh of Najaf ! Cease firing, miscreants, and respect my guests !" Finding that the firing-party paid absolutely no attention to him, but only fired a few more shots, he became black with fury, and ordered his retainers to attack them. As they were under cover of some ruins on the top of a high mound, there would certainly have been bloodshed if Goldsmith and I had not managed to pull him back and induce him to drive on.

I am informed on all sides that the disorder on this road only dates from the abandonment of Baghdad by the Turks. If not taken in hand at once the situation will grow rapidly worse. I would suggest that immediate steps be taken either by establishing police posts at the four places mentioned above, which are all very strong natural

positions, which could easily be held by from six to ten men each, with a central authority at Mahmudiyah, which itself needs protection ; or by putting pressure on the sheikhs concerned. The objection to the second alternative, more especially on the road from Baghdad to Mahmudiyah, is that the authority of the sheikhs is said to be practically non-existent, and the making of a nominal sheikh responsible for a section of the road is likely to induce further outrages with the object of getting him into trouble.

There was one continual string of caravans coming in from Museyib to Baghdad laden with wheat, barley, and rice. Prices quoted by various people questioned *en route* worked out at from Rs. 100 to Rs. 125 a ton of barley at Museyib and from Rs. 130 to Rs. 160 delivered in Baghdad. I have only made preliminary enquiries here, but have not yet heard any price mentioned which is less than the above. I was asked what price Government was prepared to pay. As my instructions set a limit of Rs. 45 a ton for barley and Rs. 50 per ton for wheat, I replied that I was only on a tour of inspection to collect information as to rates, and was not going to make any offers just then.

*April 6th, Museyib.*—Visited Hindieh Barrage and collected information here. All merchants are emphatic in asking for some permanent sign that the Euphrates is again under settled government. They consider that our visit will have, in fact has already had, an excellent effect, but they earnestly hope that it is only the precursor to the establishment of some recognised occupation, whether in force or not. Large numbers of valuable machines and stores are said to have been looted from the barrage, but the barrage itself is in good order. The houses near the barrage are badly damaged, all roofs, doors, window-frames, and

contents having been removed in all cases except two small houses which were occupied by the workmen who open and close the lock-gates. One Sayed Razen, who lives a mile above the barrage on the left bank, and was formerly farmer of the lock and gate dues, is still collecting them and paying the men who work the gates. I strongly recommend an experienced officer being sent as soon as possible to inspect, report, and collect looted material.

The town of Museyib is guarded day and night. Loopholed walls and gates have recently been built at commanding points. Rifles and ammunition are abundant. Stray shots are being fired at all times from dusk to midnight. Sayed Razen has just built himself a crenellated and loopholed house for fear of the neighbouring tribes. It will be interesting to see if this is being done elsewhere.

The boat-bridge, though broken, could easily be mended at Museyib. The people beg that they may be officially authorised to pay the expenses of reconstruction from municipal dues, and that an engineer may be sent to show them how to do it. This might be combined with the suggested inspection of the barrage.

I inspected the seven large *sifs* or granaries of the town to-day.

(Details follow of the thousand tons of grain I found in them and of other local products.)

The left bank between Museyib and the barrage is covered with growing wheat and barley. A leading merchant of Najaf named Haji Rauf tells me that the grain of the Euphrates valley ought to be enough to supply a force of 200,000 men with ease. Hillah and Hindieh are the two chief places from which grain is brought here.

*April 8th, Kerbela.*—Left Museyib yesterday morning and arrived here midday by carriage. Im-

mediately outside Museyib we passed between a large body of the Masaud (said to have been 2,000 strong, apparently not less than 600) and the outposts of the Janabiyin. A quarrel was imminent between these two tribes over the action of the latter in holding up and robbing two carriages on the road within Masaud territory. The Masaud official attitude was one of righteous indignation that such an outrage should be possible on a road for which they were responsible. On arrival here we heard that the matter had been amicably settled, but it appears unlikely that the victims obtained any satisfaction.

The Haji had a triumph here which quite wiped out his failure at Khan Azad. Seeing the hostile armies facing each other across the only road, he gallantly went forward and called a parley. "You must wait," he said, "until these distinguished representatives of the great British Government have passed through on their way to the Holy Shrines, before you begin hostilities," and they sat in respectful silence while our crazy vehicle carried us past them, saluting royally to right and left.

We were met two miles outside the town by Sheikh Fakhruddin and fifty horsemen, who escorted us to the latter's garden where two pavilions have been placed at our disposal. The streets were lined with an apparently appreciative crowd, the women expressing satisfaction by the usual ululation. Considerable damage has been done in the town, many buildings being in ruins. The shrines themselves were only just touched, probably by accident, and the damage done has been repaired for some time. I called this morning on the four most important religious leaders in the town. All were profuse in their welcome and in expressions of

relief and congratulation at the defeat of the Turks. They were also loud in their praises of Sheikh Fakhruddin and Sheikh Muhammad Ali Kamunah, without whom they said that Kerbela would have been worse outraged than Hillah.

In their efforts to maintain order in these turbulent areas, the Turks had come into violent conflict with the Arabs at Hillah during the previous year, and had arrested and threatened to kill the leading Sayed, who is mentioned below.

They said that Hamza Beg, who was before the War a popular and politic governor, seemed to have completely changed his nature recently. He invited them all to a meeting at which he professed that he would discuss the best means to benefit the town. They all declined to go, being convinced that his intention was to imprison them and to steal the treasure. The treasure house is now walled up and sealed by the Ulema, who have nominated Sheikh Fakhruddin as *Kalid-dar* pending ratification from the British military authorities.

The *Kalid-dar*, or keeper of the keys, is a very important personage at each of the holy cities of Iraq, being the guardian of the Holy Places and of their treasures.

The late *Kalid-dar* was nominated by the Turks without reference to the Ulema or the people. He left Kerbela with them and deserted his charge, and those Ulema whom I saw are very anxious that Sheikh Fakhruddin should now be officially recognised as having taken his place.

The position at Diwaniyah seems to be that there is a Turkish *mutasarrif* there still and from 150 to 250 troops with their officers. There are no guns, and the gun ammunition was all thrown into the

river. It is said to have been of two kinds, one black, the other red. The Arabs immediately began fishing it out again, opening it, and selling the sticks of melinite in the bazaar. There are two different stories about the men's rifles. One says that they have them still and are allowed to keep them for the defence of the town against the surrounding tribes: the other says that Sheikh Muhammad ibn Haji Mohesin of Diwaniyah has taken the rifles and distributed them to the natives of the town, keeping a register showing the owner of each weapon, with the assurance that they will be duly returned if and when the troops leave. Equally varying are the accounts of the attitude and condition of the Turks. One version represents them as having announced that even if they would otherwise die of starvation, they would never surrender; the other pictures them as being in great straits for money, selling all their belongings, even to the officers' horses, and to all intents and purposes besieged in their camp. This last version, which goes with the story that the rifles had been taken away, was told me by a follower of Haji Atteya who left Diwaniyah on the 5th instant. I sounded Haji Atteya as to the practicability or otherwise of bringing them in as prisoners. He suggests writing in his own name to Sheikh Muhammad ibn Haji Mohesin and telling him that if the Turks will give themselves up he undertakes to safe-conduct them to Baghdad or Museyib. I rather question his ability to ensure their safe passage to Baghdad, judging by the fact that we ourselves were not entirely freed from annoyance by his presence the other day, and on second thoughts he was inclined to agree. At the same time it may possibly turn out to be the case that the march to Museyib under his safe-conduct would be their only way out of a very difficult and dangerous position. I should be glad to know if I



am authorised to use my discretion in this matter on arrival at Najaf.

Nawab Afdhal Khan paid a call to-day, with several of the leading Indians of Kerbela. I had sent word yesterday to Muhammad Baqir to make out a list of British subjects in the town. After some discussion, during which I was told that there was a great deal of real want among them, I decided to give the Nawab a draft for L.T.150 to relieve immediate needs. I enclose a copy of the draft, which includes 2 per cent. commission. The Nawab is forming a temporary distribution committee and will send a complete account for adjustment. There are about 650 persons concerned, each of whom will receive from three to four rupees. I told the Nawab to distribute equally to all, as this was only a small token that the British Military Authorities were anxious to take the first opportunity to promote the welfare of British subjects in Kerbela.

We are being most hospitably entertained and looked after. I visited the Turkish hospital about a mile outside the town this afternoon and was taken on my return to see the municipal meeting-house in one of the squares of the town. A large crowd at once collected in the square, and music and singing followed. There can be no doubt that the people here are delighted at being freed from the Turks. They are very anxious to get news, and I promised Sheikh Fakhruddin that as soon as arrangements have been made for a news-sheet to be printed in Baghdad he would be sent copies.

*April 12th, Najaf.*—We left Kerbela on the 10th, arriving here the same day. I had another long talk with the Nawab before leaving. I also saw Sayed Murtadha, the *Kalid-dar* of the shrine of Abbas in Kerbela, and Sayed Hadi, uncle of the *Kalid-dar* of Najaf. From various conversations I gathered

that the important sheikhs of this district are the two chiefs of the Beni Hassan, Alwan and Umran. It is difficult to get any accurate account of the history of their dealings with or against the Turks. The Nawab states that it was only his sending Muhammad Hussein (now with you) to them which prevented them from sacking the holy cities as soon as the Turks had left them. There is distinct uneasiness in both towns as to their probable future attitude. Sayed Hadi, who owns a large house on the left bank just below Kufa, appears to have great influence among the tribes. He is on his way to Kadhimain, and I promised to mention to you that he is ill and would be glad of medical advice. I explained at the same time that you would be glad to see him if he wished to pursue the matter further.

One of the most important needs of this district is some form of news service. Distorted versions of actual occurrences are a source of danger. As an example, there is a story of a soldier having attempted to enter the Shrine at Kadhimain. On the whole, however, the general impression is that every respect is being paid to holy places. I have heard it stated that immediately on our arrival we fire a salute of 100 guns to the Shrine at Kadhimain. I promised Sheikh Fakhruddin that he would not be forgotten if it was decided later on to print a news-sheet in Baghdad. He would also be grateful for some copies of the Arabic map of the world.

Rumours are being spread that troops are being sent down here. We have more than once been asked whether it is true that cavalry have started for Diwanayah. I have always professed ignorance as to movements of troops, explaining that even if I knew anything I should be bound to say I knew nothing.

Our greeting here was more impressive than at

Kerbela, owing to the fact of our being with Haji Atteya. Two hundred horsemen rode out nearly four miles to meet us, and when we arrived at the Wadi as Salam dense crowds were standing on the slopes outside the walls. On a hint from the Haji we got out and walked in through the burial ground.

From Kerbela to Najaf our way had lain over high gravel desert without a tree or blade of grass. I know of no more impressive sight than the great gold dome of the tomb of Ali floating above the dust-coloured walls of the city of Najaf, which stands high on the very edge of the desert, and is fringed on all sides by countless tombs of pious Shiahs, whose bodies in their flimsy coffins are borne hundreds of miles to this sacred resting-place.

It took us an hour to get to his house, all the streets being packed with sight-seers. There was no acclamation and no women were in evidence, but a great number of the onlookers, especially the crowds outside the gate, had clearly come out to welcome and not merely to gape at us.

Haji Atteya staged a public reception for us in the main square of the city, and made a speech in the course of which he invited the people to admire our consideration in having followed the example of the Shah of Persia and dismounted outside the cemetery area. One of the other three town sheikhs, who did not like the prominence which our arrival had given to the Haji, rather spoilt the effect of this by remarking in a loud aside, "Atteya put them up to that, of course!"

We stayed in the Haji's house while we were at Najaf and he showed us the two-storied *serdabs* (cool chambers) in which he and the other wealthy

Najafis spend the heat of the day in the summer months. They are hewn out of the solid sandstone on which the city is built, and ventilated by a network of tunnels connecting the deep underground wells from which it used to get its water-supply. The blazing sunshine which is such a terror by day for six months in the year is filtered to a dim twilight down the eighty-foot shafts which lead to the upper air, and the temperature is brought down to something like eighty degrees instead of the hundred and twenty in the shade that prevails at the surface.

There can be no doubt that our arrival in Baghdad is really welcome to all townsmen and religious leaders, but, as one of them pointed out to me at Kufa to-day, it is difficult for them to transfer their allegiance all in a moment, fully as they realise that the change is for the better.

After visiting Sayed Muhammad Kadhim Yezdi (the leading Shiah divine of Iraq) at Kufa, we crossed the river to Sayed Hadi's house, where we were received by his son Sayed Hussein. Umran of the Beni Hassan with about a dozen other sheikhs of his own tribe and of the Fatlah came down from Kufa to see us. Alwan, who was near Kufa, did not follow him. It had been suggested that we should visit him in his town house, but Sayed Mahdi, who was in charge of us for the day, pointed out that it would be more suitable for him to visit us, either in the room in which we lunched in Kufa or at the Sayed's house. Umran apparently accepted this, but Alwan did not appear. I had a long talk with Umran, which ended in his announcing his intention of coming back with us to Baghdad. I promised to visit him at Hindieh, where he lives, on the way, and to bring him on. Alwan may or

may not decide to join him. The two pressing questions from the point of view of the tribes are the restoration of the Sari' bund near Feluja and the completion of the Jadwal, or escape, above the Hindieh Barrage. Neither of these is said to present any other difficulty than the provision of funds and the superintendence of a trained engineer.

Umran was very proud of his arrangements for keeping routes open, and also of having locked up and taken charge of the Turkish barracks at Hindieh. He appears to be aiming at authority from Government to administer his territory.

*April 17th, Hillah.*—On the 13th I inspected the creek on which Najaf at present depends for its water supply. It is only from three to six feet wide. The banks are steep and sandy and continually fall in. To make a really good channel out of it would demand a considerable amount of labour and supervision, but to improve it sufficiently for this hot weather would be easy. The alternative sources of supply are firstly, the old subterranean aqueducts which would be costly to repair, and secondly the pipe line, which would be useless without pumps. The cleaning of the creek would, I think, have an excellent effect.

The second urgent demand in Najaf is for oil and candles, especially for the tomb of Ali. The shrine was largely dependent before the War on gifts from Persia and India. The late *Kalid-dar*, who died about two months ago, is said to have been providing candles to a certain extent from his own pocket, and his son Sayed Ahmed, the present *Kalid-dar*, professes to be doing the same. I have told him to send you certified copies of previous monthly lighting accounts, attested by the Ulema, to enable you to form an estimate of amounts really needed. Sayed Ahmed, who is recognised by all as the rightful successor to his father, would

be glad if his position as *Kalid-dar* could be officially recognised.

There is a certain amount of jealousy between the four town sheikhs, notably on the subject of passes and ammunition. Any feeling there might have been about our staying with Haji Atteya was, I hope, removed by my visiting each of the other three's houses and insisting on them all accompanying me when I visited the Ulema. This was on the 14th. They all appeared genuinely pleased to see us, and were quite as cordial as the Ulema of Kerbela. I explained in each case that I had been ordered to report on the condition and the needs of the people of Najaf. All disclaimed any personal wishes, but all put forward the claims of Najaf to special consideration from the new Government. The town sheikhs repeatedly called the various Ulema to witness that there were no differences between them, and there would, I think, be no difficulty in dealing with the town as a whole. If some form of town council, consisting of the four sheikhs, the *Kalid-dar*, and the head of the municipality, were officially installed and a president elected in the presence of a British representative, there would appear to be no reason why the affairs of the town should not be conducted with perfect success until the end of the War, provided that an occasional visit of inspection were paid by a representative of the British military authorities. The same applies to Kerbela. Both towns are quite capable of defending themselves against the only enemies which are at all likely to attack them, namely, the Beni Hassan on the one side and Ibn Rashid on the other. All that they require is official recognition of their own institutions, and an occasional visit of inspection.

We left Najaf on the 15th for Kifil, where we spent the night. Umran of the Beni Hassan, with a

number of sheikhs of the Fatlah, Isar, etc., came to see me again next morning. The news we had received in Najaf was that these sheikhs had all bound themselves by oath to some course of action which no one could define, but which was variously reported to be the sacking of Hillah, an attack on Najaf, or a march across to Bagheilah, with the object of attacking the troops there. The atmosphere when their party and ours met was highly charged. Haji Atteya made matters worse by entering into a loud argument as to whether the patriarch Judah, whose grave is at Kifil, belonged rather to the Beni Hassan or to the people of Najaf. He then asked Umran what he intended to do. I had to interpose and remind him that it was not his business. We then retired with Umran and his following for a private conversation.

Umran told me straight out that all those present had bound themselves by an oath to stand or fall together. He then asked how the British Government intended to treat the tribes. After a series of explanations on my part, the most effective of which was the assurance that it was a rule with us to refuse to listen to accusations of any kind except in the presence of the accused, the party appeared fairly satisfied. There is no doubt that they are very nervous that others will be either put over them or listened to to their prejudice—an impression which Haji Atteya is inclined to strengthen by giving unasked-for advice.

The town versus tribe feeling is exceedingly strong here. The townsmen do not hesitate to accuse the tribesmen of every kind of lawlessness and exaction. The towns on the water-ways are almost in a state of siege. Here in Hillah three watchmen are posted on the minaret of the mosque and fire whenever they see a horseman beyond the date-groves. This is not the only precaution taken.

Both here and at Museyib the ends of streets facing the desert are bricked up and loopholed. There is reason for the townsmen's attitude. Extortionate dues are taken from travellers under cover of the pretence of keeping the roads open. Twenty *bellums* laden with grain have collected here, the *nakhuda* being afraid to take them on to Museyib. A petition has just this moment been brought to me by a traveller who was waylaid and robbed to-day by the Khafaja, his companion having actually been abducted by them. But the townsman makes the most of his legitimate grievances. I have been assured many times that the Beni Hassan intended to sack Najaf and Kerbela. Sayed Mehdi, the Nawab Afdhal Kwan, Sayed Hadi, and various others all claim to have been the saviours of the holy shrines. As a matter of fact, the roads in Beni Hassan territory appear to be safer than anywhere else. In any case, we hope to go to Hindieh tomorrow, where I shall see Umran for the third time, and take a note of any demands he may wish me to put forward, such as the completion of the Jadwal and the bunding of the Sari'.

It is very difficult to make any kind of accurate report or forecast on local produce at present. We are naturally confined to actual routes, and see very little of the country. The resources of the Euphrates valley in grain would appear to be almost inexhaustible. I have not yet had an opportunity of visiting the *sifs* of this town, said to be thirteen in number. I hope to submit a fuller report later. The one which I have inspected contains about 400 tons of grain—I am told that there are altogether between 6,000 and 7,000 tons now in the town.

I have heard the following details about the enemy forces that were originally on this line. There was one battalion of Russian prisoners under a Major Ramazanoff. One company was at Museyib,



two at Hillah, and one at Diwaniyah. When the Turks retired from this line, 35 men were left at Diwaniyah to guard an ammunition dump which was to be brought up by water later. They had a Turkish *bimbashi* and two Arab officers, all of whom they killed. They also wounded two Turkish officers, one of whom ran away through Hillah and rejoined the Turkish forces, while the other, a native of Hillah, fled to his brother at Rumehi. The thirty-five Russians in Diwaniyah are afraid of the Turks because they killed their officers, afraid of the tribes, and afraid of us because they were told that we should treat them as traitors if we caught them. Another company was left in charge of an ammunition dump at Kowerish, where the headquarters of the Babylon excavations were. They are said to have scattered among the tribes and to be still wandering in Arab clothes, herding sheep, etc. There is said to be a larger dump at Kowerish from which the tribes took only rifles and small-arm ammunition. There is also a storehouse belonging to the German excavators which is being looted by the local sheikh. I propose to go there on the 19th and put in an official watchman. I have only added this now to correct previous incorrect information about the Diwaniyah force.

*April 19th, Hillah.*—We left Kifil on the 16th for Hillah. We were met about half-way by Sheikh Ibrahim of the Khafaja and 60 horsemen, who greeted us with the usual display of horsemanship. At his invitation we rode to his *madhif* on the Machariyah creek and dined, while our baggage went on direct. When the Turks evacuated Hillah, the tribes, who had been watching for their departure, poured in. They sacked all Government buildings, wantonly destroying what they could not remove. They did not do much damage in the town except in the Hitawin quarter, where a colony

of people from Hit live who appear to be generally disliked. The Isar and Khafaja tribes are said to have contemplated establishing a Government of their own in Hillah, but the Zobeid, Beni Hassan, and Fatlah turned them out. After a few days the inhabitants of the town came dribbling back from Najaf and other places. The nine *mukhtars* of the town began collecting rifles, distributing Government grain, and fortifying all entrances. There must be at present about 1,500 rifles in the town, of which 40 or 50 are English.

After leaving Sheikh Ibrahim we rode into Hillah, where we had a most enthusiastic reception. Nearly 1,000 armed men, in three or four groups, danced out to meet us and escorted us with shouts and occasional shots through the ruined streets. The women were especially shrill in their welcome. It is no exaggeration to say that a quarter of the town is in ruins. The narrow streets are choked with debris and refuse. The Turks, the tribes, and the townspeople themselves seem to have vied with each other in indiscriminate looting and destruction. The nine *mukhtars*, each of whom is trying to make himself into a sheikh, have taken no steps to restore order. The bridge, which consists of only eight *shakhturaks* (flat-bottomed boats), has not been put together, though the materials are all to hand. Shots are fired at all hours of the day and night. A black slave named Zanga is allowed to terrorise travellers and assault women from a fort not two miles outside the town on the Hindieh road, and all the 1,500 armed men of the town are unable to stop it. For a fortnight or more both the Baghdad and Hindieh roads have been closed to all who prefer not to be robbed *en route*. The flow of grain from Afej and Daghara has been seriously interfered with. No one will drive sheep into Baghdad. In fact, the tribes near the town are

revelling in the absence of constituted authority, and making what they can while they can. The sooner an A.P.O. is put here, the better. If he was authorised to raise local police it would not, I think, be necessary for troops to be sent here, but an occasional aeroplane reconnaissance would be required to overawe the more distant tribes.

Was this an intelligent anticipation of the future establishment of air control in Iraq?

A detachment at the Barrage would serve the double purpose of protecting the works and forming a link between here and Baghdad. What I think would best serve all purposes would be to send some Pioneers to the Barrage, who would not only serve as a guard, but could also supervise the earthwork on the Jadwal if it is decided to complete it before it is too late for the *sefi* (summer) crop. I am told that there remain only 2,500 metres to be dug. The depth varies from one to two metres and the width from seven to fifteen. This would mean at the most two million cubic feet of earthwork or ten days' work for 2,000 men. The completion of this work would be a most popular measure. It was nearly finished in 1914 and would if completed have gone a long way towards allaying the growing discontent against the Turkish Government. What the water supply is to Najaf, the escapes above the Hindieh Barrage are to the tribes along the Hindieh channel. Both schemes were begun by the Turks before the war. Both fell through because of the war. If we could show that in spite of paramount military considerations we were still prepared to spend money for what appears to them to be their sole benefit, we should, I think, go a long way towards ensuring the content and quiet of the Euphrates tribes for the remainder of the war.

We called on Sayed Muhammad Ali Kazvini on the 17th, and congratulated him on his escape. He is to return the call this evening, and I propose to give him L.T.100 to distribute among the poor of the town, as a special case. There is undoubtedly a great deal of misery and want here, and I hope to prevail on him to accept the responsibility of relieving some of it, though I fear that he may shrink from the attendant worry and inconvenience. If he does, I propose to instruct him to make out a statement of the most deserving cases and to send it to you direct.

I went to Hindieh yesterday and inspected the town. Umran and his following, with the Fatlah sheikhs, received me and were extremely friendly. They hope to come to Baghdad in a day or two, bringing the Khafaja and Isar sheikhs with them. I told them that the sooner they came the better, as I did not think it likely that any orders would be given about the Jadwal until they had done so. I was careful at the same time to make no kind of promise.

I drove to Babylon this morning and inspected the headquarters of the German archæologists. So far as I can see, everything is untouched, except some 200 rifles and ammunition which have of course been taken. The caretaker, Habib Ibn Alawi, looks a great rascal, but he has apparently confined himself to taking what he could immediately dispose of, and has guarded the actual antiquities and the personal property of his late employers surprisingly well. I put him officially in charge of the house and of the excavations and promised that if no further harm was done he would not be forgotten.

*April 21st, Baghdad.*—We left Hillah by carriage at 4.30 yesterday morning and arrived here at 4 p.m. I have handed to the Controller of Local

Produce a complete statement of grain actually at Hillah and Hindieh. In each town I have appointed an official to keep an accurate register showing daily totals of imports, exports, and transit cargoes, which they were ordered to keep ready for inspection at any time, as required. I gave orders for the bridge at Hillah to be put together again without delay, a statement of expenses incurred being sent to you. On the way in yesterday we met the M.G.R.E. and party, who were on the way to the Barrage, and I mentioned the question of the Jadwal to him.

The general impressions left by my tour are as follows :

The townsmen, except in Kerbela and Najaf, which have never depended much on Government assistance for their protection, are eagerly looking forward to the restoration of order. The tribes have had a taste of independence and the longer they are left to enjoy it the more difficult will it be to control them later. At the same time they quite realise that they are incapable of developing the country even to the extent that they themselves would like to see. As the Arab proverb puts it, their brain is in their eyes. Let them but see that a good Government will really benefit them and they will accept the discipline and the tribute without which no good Government can exist. Sayed Muhammad Ali Kazvini was very eloquent on the subject of revenue collection. "Take something," he said, "if it is only one-tenth of your due—but take it at once." With all respect to his superior experience of the local population, I would suggest that this would be beginning at the wrong end. We should give, not take, to start with. And the sooner we give, the better. Bridges, telegraph lines, and roads can be restored immediately at trifling cost. We must at least show that our rule confers equal

benefits with that to which they have been accustomed before we attempt to exact what our predecessors failed to win, the respect and willing submission of a subject people.

It will be noted that here again there is no mention of independence, and the rather pompous conclusion shows that it never entered my head that Iraq was ready for it. The report shows, I think, that the country was so obviously unready for self-government that no one on the spot could possibly have advocated anything at that stage but the substitution of British for Turkish control. It is true that General Maude had been made to publish a high-sounding proclamation on his entry into Baghdad in which he said that we had come into the country not as conquerors but as liberators, and invited the people of Baghdad, through their nobles, elders, and representatives, to participate in the management of their civil affairs in collaboration with ourselves, so that they might unite with their kinsmen in the north, south, east, and west in realising the aspirations of their race. It is also true that immediately after the occupation of Baghdad, His Majesty's Government laid it down as their policy that though the Basrah vilayet should remain under British administration, the Baghdad vilayet was to be made into an Arab State, with a local ruler or Government, and to be administered as an Arab province. What the promoters of this policy did not realise was that there was at that time in Iraq no foundation upon which to build a local Government, and no individual who would have commanded acceptance as a local ruler. One effort was actually made to dovetail an ex-Turkish Arab

official into the British administrative machine, but he was naturally unable to adapt himself to the novel conditions, and was soon removed. In the same way, the policy of making some distinction between our administration of the two vilayets while the War was actually in progress was bound to fail, and in a comparatively short time the Basrah system had been extended to cover the newly occupied territory.

A fortnight after my return to Baghdad a small force was sent down to Museyib, with Goldsmith as Assistant Political Officer, and I went with them to organise the despatch of grain to Baghdad. Colonel Dickson had in the meanwhile been made a Deputy Director under the Director of Supply and Transport, and the Local Produce Department had become the Department of Local Resources. In theory, the maximum prices of forty rupees per ton for barley and fifty rupees for wheat were still in force, but I took the precaution before I started of arming myself with written authority from Colonel Dickson to "purchase barley and arrange for its transport to Baghdad at the best rates obtainable at Museyib or elsewhere." General Maude's rapid advance had strained his line of communications to the utmost, and I was told that I must try to send in a hundred tons of grain a day. Our previous tour had to some extent restored confidence, and as I bumped over the dusty track, in a Ford van this time, I met a greater number of caravans of donkeys and camels bringing in supplies for Baghdad city. I stopped some of them, to make enquiries about price and transport, and found that I must reckon on six or seven camels, or alternatively fifteen or sixteen donkeys, being

required to carry one ton of grain. This meant that at least six hundred camels or fifteen hundred donkeys must reach Baghdad every day, and as the round trip from Museyib to Baghdad and back, a distance of sixty-three miles, apparently took five or six days, I should have to find at least three thousand camels or seven thousand five hundred donkeys, or half this number of each, if I was to meet the army's requirements.

When I got to Museyib, on the evening of the 4th May, I went round the granaries, and found them quite as full as they had been three weeks before. The Euphrates was crowded with *maheilas*, the large sailing-craft of the rivers of Iraq, laden with grain from the fertile areas downstream. I saw that the amount I could send in to Baghdad was limited only by transport, and began at once to make enquiries. The first thing I discovered was that it would be easy to send the *maheilas* on upstream to Mufraz, the nearest point on the Euphrates to Baghdad, with which it was connected by a light Decauville line, and also to Feluja, where there was a Local Purchase Officer of the upper Euphrates force. After sending an urgent message to Baghdad asking for arrangements to be made at these two places to deal with anything I could send up, I turned to the land-transport problem. I saw at once that I must not allow private competition with my convoys, especially as I proposed to take the grain at a price which was much lower than the rate in the Baghdad market, and the merchants would have outbid me with the carriers to get their stuff away. The way to stop this was by making all carriers from the Euphrates show a pass from Goldsmith or myself at the Iron Bridge, over which they



luckily had to go in order to get into Baghdad. I called the merchants together and explained that this was being done, and then plunged into my first buying operation.

"What is the local price of barley?" I asked. "I have been sent to buy barley for the British Army. I know nothing about grain prices, and should like you to tell me how much it costs."

The merchants looked at each other, whispered together, and then said :

"Ninety-three rupees a ton."

"Very well," I said, "I will take up to a hundred tons a day at that rate until further notice. I must warn you, though, that the price will fall in a few days' time."

"By God, my brother," said the spokesman, "it is clear that thou knowest nothing of grain prices if thou thinkest that a hundred tons a day can be taken and that the price will fall. The price will rise !"

"Not so," said I, "the price will fall, but let me have as much as possible while it is still high."

Most of the animals had already left for Baghdad, but I collected a hundred and fifty camels, which with the sixty transport carts that had come down with the detachment enabled me to send off forty-two tons early next morning. I also sent up six *maheilas* with a hundred tons to Mufraz. On the next two days I could only send sixty-six tons, but on the 8th May some more *maheilas* reached Museyib and I got off another hundred and sixty-two tons, which brought my average for the first four days to just over ninety-two. On that day I got Goldsmith to publish a notice saying that on and from the 14th May I would only pay eighty rupees a ton. This

caused some consternation among the merchants, who shut up their granaries next day and refused to give me any more grain, all but one, who let me have seventeen tons. On this I enlisted ten youths as policemen, tied red bands round their arms, broke open the largest granary, and carried off ninety-three tons. Seeing that I was in earnest, the merchants then came and asked whether I thought it fair to give this one man the benefit of the higher price. They suggested that I should take equally from them all, if I had really decided to reduce the price later on. I told them that I could not be bothered with picking out small parcels of grain from all the different granaries, but that I was quite ready to have a Dutch auction each day, and to take only from the merchant who offered me the lowest price. As a spur to competition I added that I would give one-quarter of the transport animals to the lowest bidder with which he might take what he liked into Baghdad. This idea was successful beyond my wildest hopes, and a spirited auction resulted in one man offering me barley at seventy-six rupees a ton to get it taken before the price fell to eighty! By the 17th May I had sent to Baghdad and Mufraz just under fifteen hundred and fifty tons of grain, which gave an average for the thirteen days of nearly one hundred and twenty tons a day.

The time had now arrived to bring the price down still further, as Goldsmith and I had arranged to go down to Hillah on the 21st and start the same kind of operations there. On the 18th May we published another notice reducing the rate to seventy rupees a ton from the 20th May. This had the effect of drying up the supply from Hillah, but

there was enough at Museyib to keep us going for two or three days, and on the afternoon of the 21st May I got on board a *maheila* and floated down to Hillah, leaving two officers who had been working with me for ten days to carry on at Museyib. After a restful fourteen hours on the river, which reminded me of my raft journey down the Tigris, I reached Hillah at four in the morning on the 22nd, sent for all the merchants, and introduced myself as the officer who had been taking barley at Museyib.

"I want to take some of your barley now," I said, "but I am not sure about the rate. I understand that all your grain comes up from Afej and Daghara. How far away are they?"

"As from Museyib to Hillah," said an old grey-beard.

"And *maheilas* are expensive nowadays, are they not?" I said. "Why, they tell me at Museyib that it costs three or even four rupees a ton to bring up grain from Hillah. I am very anxious to fix the price correctly here, and would be glad if you would tell me if this is really so. How much do you pay per ton from Afej and Daghara? Surely not so much as three rupees?"

"Three rupees?" said the old man. "Three rupees? By God, we pay four!"

All the merchants then began shouting at the top of their voices. "What is this? What does he say? Four rupees? Nay, by God, four and a half! Say five! Say five and a quarter! Who says five and a quarter? I ask pardon of God. What does he say? By God, we pay five and a half!"

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merchant in the town. As soon as he had been told what the question was, he addressed the gathering as follows :

“ My friends, let us speak the truth. The officer asks us whether the people of Museyib were right in saying that the transport of grain from Hillah costs four rupees. You have told him that the rate is the same as that from Afej to Hillah. This is true, but you have erred greatly in your estimate of the cost.”

Then, turning to me and speaking with great emphasis : “ By God, and thy head, O officer, the rate from Afej to Hillah, as from Hillah to Museyib, is six rupees and a quarter per ton.”

“ Are you all agreed on that ? ” I asked.

“ Yea, verily.” “ Truth.” “ The right is with him,” came from all sides.

“ Thank you,” I said. “ The decision then is easy. The Government price of grain at Museyib is seventy rupees a ton. Since it costs six and a quarter rupees to take it there from Hillah, the price at Hillah is sixty-three and three-quarters, and I will take up to one hundred tons a day at that price from your granaries, but if you prefer to send it to Museyib I will still pay seventy rupees for it there.”

There was a moment's stupefied silence, and then babel broke loose. All the other merchants turned on the little Jew and rent him to pieces.

“ Oh ! head of stone,” they cried, “ what hast thou said ? He was asking us the cost of transport from Afej to Hillah, to grant us a good price. How can we sell our grain at sixty-three and three-quarters ? By God, we shall be ruined ! ”

I knew very well that they would not be ruined, as Goldsmith, who came down the day before, had

told me that for most of the barley in Hillah the merchants had paid not more than forty rupees a ton, while a large proportion of it had been stolen from the Turkish Government granaries, so my withers were quite unwrung. I told them that they had till that night to send their *maheilas* to Museyib, where they would get seventy rupees a ton for their barley, but that if they did not send enough I would take what I wanted from their granaries and pay for it at the rate which they themselves had fixed.

Next morning, finding that they had done nothing, I enlisted ten policemen, broke open the nearest granary and sent a hundred and forty tons by river to Museyib and a few tons by road. On the following day I did the same, but on the third day they thought better of it and sent up the stuff themselves. At the same time they sent a long petition to General Maude, but he merely ordered that their books should be seized and inspected, with the result that they were shown to be making a very handsome profit.

I went back to Baghdad soon afterwards, to act for Colonel Dickson who was away on tour. In his absence I had more than once to attend General Maude's weekly meeting of heads of Departments, at which he used to stand at a small desk, looking over his glasses at the beribboned staff, who sat before him like uneasy schoolboys. He had a wonderful grasp of detail, and delighted in catching them out one after another. At the first meeting I attended he went for the Sapper representative.

"How is the bridge over the Diala getting on?" he asked.

"Well in hand, sir, well in hand," said the Sapper.

"Oh!"—pause. "I usually find when I am

told that anything is well in hand that nothing whatever has been done. What have you done?"

"Well, sir, as a matter of fact, we are still waiting for the pontoons."

"Oh!"—pause. "Have you ever thought of building the bridge on guffas?"

"Guffas, sir?"—a chuckle. "No."

"Oh!"—pause. "What do you suppose is the floating tonnage of an eight-foot guffa? About three tons, I suppose?" (I cannot remember how many tons he said.)

"An eight-foot guffa, sir? Yes. Yes. Almost exactly three tons, I should think."

"Oh!"—pause. "Well, build the bridge on guffas, then, and I will come and see it next week!"

Then he turned to me. "Well, Young, how are you doing this week?"

"Not quite so well, sir, I'm afraid. Only just a hundred tons a day."

"Oh!"—pause. "I don't call that bad. He's worth six of your P-boats to me anyway, isn't he, X?"

"Six of my P-boats, sir?" said X. "I'm afraid I don't understand."

"Oh!"—pause. "You don't understand? How many tons does one of your P-boats bring up?"

"Three hundred tons, sir."

"Oh!"—pause. "And how long do you allow for the trip from Basrah to Baghdad and back?"

"About twenty days, sir, with loading and unloading."

"Oh! Well, work it out, and see how many tons a day it comes to!"

It was fearfully hot in Baghdad that summer, the temperature going up to 129 degrees, but in our comfortable billet on the river we did not feel it

much. Colonel Dickson was a very cheery companion, and delighted in giving banquets, at which we ate Tigris turtle, Euphrates salmon, and many other local delicacies. Towards the end of August he blossomed out as a full-blown Director, and applied for me to be transferred from the Political to become in name what I had for some time been in fact, his deputy. I rather welcomed the transfer, since with the growth of his department my position as an attached Political Officer was becoming rather delicate. Wilson had by that time come up from Basrah, where he had been acting as Deputy for Sir Percy Cox, and there were questions upon which Colonel Dickson's ideas of the scope and activities of his Department were liable to clash with those held in the Chief Political Office. After a short time spent in visits to the various advanced supply depots on the Euphrates, Tigris, and Diala, in the course of one of which I saw a German aeroplane for the first time, at Samarra, my transfer was authorised, and I went down to Basrah as Deputy Director of Local Resources there.

My chief business at Basrah was to buy ten thousand tons of dates, which were chiefly needed for export to armies on other fronts. I found when I got there that someone had rather unwisely called for tenders for the whole ten thousand tons, the result being that the four principal firms, neither of which had as many as ten thousand tons to sell, had joined forces and put in a combined tender, at what I knew to be an impossibly high rate. I asked the four representatives to come and see me, and explained that I was new to commercial dealings, though I had had a little experience of buying grain on the Euphrates.



“ Tell me, gentlemen,” I said, “ what is regarded as a normal percentage of profit in business.”

“ As much as you can get,” said the spokesman shortly.

“ Well, that’s honest,” I said, “ but does it apply to British firms dealing with the British Government during a war ? ”

“ No, no ! of course not,” he replied.

“ Well,” I said, “ can you tell me what is regarded as a normal percentage of profit for a British firm to make in its dealings with the British Government during a war ? ”

This stumped him for a moment ; then he said : “ I should think that would be left to the British Government to decide.”

I said that I quite agreed with him, and added that in the case of the dates the British Government had already decided that 15 per cent. was an ample margin of profit. I would therefore take the dates at the figure which I calculated would produce this result, and not at the price they had tendered. They did not like this very much, but contented themselves with sending a protest to General Maude, which met the same fate as that of the Hillah merchants.

Apart from this one transaction I had nothing very important to do at Basrah, which was perhaps as well, for my health broke down and I had to be invalided to India at the end of the year. While I was still in India I had orders to go to Cairo at once and report to the High Commissioner. Nothing more was said in the telegram, but I heard at Delhi that I was wanted for the Arab operations in which my old acquaintance, Lawrence, had so greatly distinguished himself.

# ARABIA PETRÆA

## CHAPTER VI

### HETERODOXY (AKABA, 1918)

Arab operations. Colonel Lawrence. Arab base at Akaba. Colonel Joyce and his fellow-officers. Wady Ittm. Guwera. Emir Feisal. Ja'far Pasha. Camel riding. Lawrence's wardrobe. His personality. Reconnaissance of Dhat al Haj. The Hejaz railway. The Elizabethan Lawrence. Dawnay. Capture of Semna. Attack on Maan.

HOWEVER many times a traveller may have been to the East, there is on his way back one experience which is always new. After a day or two in the Red Sea, which he finds unexpectedly wide, he wakes one morning to see a line of rocky hills stretching on either side of him, and to realise that he is now in the Gulf of Suez. As the Gulf narrows, he cannot believe that the ship will ever find her way out through that forbidding circle of rock and desert. It is only when she rounds the last headland, and he sees the white houses of Suez floating in the mirage, that he is reassured.

But where would he find himself if the navigator were really to make a mistake, and take the wrong turning in the night? There would be nothing to show him when he came on deck in the morning that he was now in the sister gulf which lies between the Peninsula of Sinai and the Land of Midian, but this time the line of precipitous hills would close ahead of him, and instead of the white houses and the bustle of canal and shipyard, he would find at last a land-locked bay from which there was no

escape. Sloping gently up from a dazzling beach, with no magic water-way to lead him to the West, he would see the sandy incline of the Wady Araba, which runs down from the Jordan and the Dead Sea, and stark against a pitiless sky the rugged and untrodden peaks of the most desolate country in the world. In ordinary times the only sign of life to be seen from the deck would be a few camels with their uncouth herds, or possibly a small fishing dhow, and tucked away in the north-east corner the ruined fort behind a fringe of palm trees which mark the tumble-down village of Akaba ; but in the month of March 1918 there were a number of tents pitched on the sand-hills, and over the ruined fort a strange flag flying.

When the Sherif of Mecca raised the standard of revolt against the Turks in 1916 and drove them out of Jeddah and Mecca, they retired to Medina, the rail-head of the Hejaz railway. Based on successive Red Sea ports, where they were helped with Allied supplies and arms, the Sherif's third son, Feisal, and his brothers worked gradually northwards, isolating an ever-lengthening strip of the line as they went, and by February 1917 the whole coast south of Akaba, with the strip of country lying between the Red Sea and the Hejaz railway, was in the hands of the Arabs. The railway itself was entirely in Turkish hands all the way from Damascus to Medina, but its military importance became progressively less as it went south. The first short section of 100 miles from Damascus to the important junction of Deraa was the trunk artery of all the railway communications in Syria and the Hejaz. From Deraa one limb ran westward through the Yarmuk gorge and supplied the main

Turkish army opposed to Allenby west of Jordan. The other ran south for fifty miles to Amman, where were Turkish headquarters east of Jordan, and again 125 miles to Maan, which had a garrison of three or four thousand. North of Maan the Turks were not confined to the railway, and had detachments in the hill-country between the line and the Dead Sea. But all along the 475 miles from Maan to Medina, where Fakhri Pasha was besieged with a large garrison, they were strung out in tiny garrisons which were pinned to the line by the rebel Arabs. This section stretched like a causeway through a sea of desert, and was vulnerable at every point to Arab attack.

Helped by a band of specially chosen British officers, who were inspired and led by Lawrence, the Sherifian leaders kept the line cut, and harassed the isolated Turkish garrisons to such an extent that Fakhri and his army were unable to rejoin the main Turkish armies in Syria. Apart from the string of garrisons along the Hejaz railway there was practically no Turkish force left between Maan and Medina except the garrison of Akaba.

The Turkish garrison of Akaba were quite prepared for a possible attack by sea. The fort had been shelled once by the Royal Navy, and although a naval bombardment was not in itself a very serious threat, it might be repeated to cover a landing; so all along the lower slopes of the granite hills above the village they had dug an elaborate trench system, which would have held up almost any attacking force. Their line of communications with Maan ran for the last thirty miles through the impregnable pass of the Wady Ittm, which offered a perfect line of retreat. So obsessed were they

with their preparations to resist a landing that it never struck them that they might be attacked in rear, and even if it had, they would soon have decided that there was nothing to fear. They had two strong posts between Maan and Akaba, one at Guwera, thirty miles inland, where the Wady Ittm broadens out into a flat plain broken by masses of red sandstone, and one at Aba'l Lissan, half-way between Guwera and Maan, on the limestone plateau which separates the Jordan and the Dead Sea from the Hejaz railway-line.

In May 1917, two months after the capture of Baghdad, Lawrence determined on his own initiative to try a bold stroke. This was nothing less than to surprise these two posts and take Akaba from the rear. The great advantage of Akaba to the Arabs was that it would provide them with a new base for their future campaign. All their supplies came by sea from Egypt, and by the transfer of their sea base at one stride from the open roadstead of Wejh to the deep land-locked anchorage of Akaba, 250 miles farther north, the Sherifian troops would join forces with General Allenby's command, and form the extreme right wing of his army in Palestine. The idea was quite mad, as it meant a three-hundred-mile raid on camels through unknown country; but Lawrence was quite mad too, with the splendid madness which made old George II say of Wolfe, "I wish he would bite some of the other generals, then." Taking with him Sherif Nasir and a handful of Bedouin, he swooped down unexpectedly from an oasis in the desert east of the railway-line, which he had reached after almost incredible exertions, and surprised and captured the line of posts which connected Maan and Akaba.

The Turkish garrison, finding themselves thus cut off from their base, surrendered, and the way was open for the further development of the plan of campaign which Feisal and Lawrence had worked out.

This involved co-operation with British troops, which was a very different thing from Bedouin operations. It was easy for Feisal to choose his own time to strike, so long as he was working independently, but now that he was actually under General Allenby's command he would have to conform to the movements of General Allenby's troops. Bedouin could not be expected to do this, however ably led, and the first step was to complete the organisation of the Sherifian regular army which Feisal had begun to recruit at Rabegh. At the same time, he could not afford to sit idle, and had to go on fighting the Turks even while his recruits were being trained ; for if he did nothing against the railway-line, the Turks might either come down on him in force and drive him into the sea, or they might evacuate the Hejaz garrisons and throw them in against General Allenby.

The rest of the year 1917 was spent in consolidating the Sherifian base at the head of the Gulf of Akaba and making the Arabs into a fighting force which could be relied upon to co-operate with General Allenby. This was necessarily a slow process, and was still going on when I left India in February 1918 to report to the High Commissioner in Cairo. I had heard vaguely of Lawrence's capture of Akaba, and of his success with the Sherifian forces, but I did not even know for certain that it was he who had sent for me. It was not until I reported to G.H.Q. at the Savoy Hotel, Cairo,

and the door opened to admit the familiar little figure, that I was enlightened. "They asked me to suggest someone who could take my place in case anything happened to me," said Lawrence, with his mischievous smile, "and I told them I thought no one could. As they pressed me, I said I could only think of Gertrude Bell and yourself, and they seemed to think you would be better for this particular job than she would. It is quite amusing, and there is plenty of honour and glory to be picked up without any great difficulty."

All the world now knows how Lawrence picked up his honour and glory. Riding alone through the desert, or with a handful of Arab companions, he made a name for himself such as no other European has made in Arabia or indeed in any other part of the world since the days of the great Elizabethan adventurers. No one will ever know quite how he did it, but we do know that there was never any need or question of his being replaced, for even if a second Lawrence could miraculously have been found, he would not have been needed. The operations of the Northern Hejaz Army under Sherif Feisal had changed their character with the capture of Akaba. Gone were the picturesque days of lone-handed enterprise and dashing raids with troops of Bedouin. The Turkish forces north of Maan were not confined to the railway, nor was it so easy to cut the line here as it had been farther south. Reinforcements and, above all, guns could be moved freely by rail to any threatened garrison, and something more than Bedouin arms, however gallantly led, was now required if permanent results were to be achieved. Lawrence himself may have realised this, but he talked to me on that first

night of cutting-out expeditions against small posts upon the line, of desert raids hundreds of miles behind the enemy front in Palestine, of camel charges against wire entanglements, of long lonely rides and sudden breathless thrills, until I did not know whether to be more alarmed or excited at the prospect of what lay before me.

I found that Lawrence was only one of the many British officers who were helping the Arabs. At first they were all under political control, but as soon as the Sherifian revolt took definite military shape, a special liaison staff was formed at General Allenby's G.H.Q. to deal with what were known as Hejaz operations, and a number of officers were attached to the Arab forces. When I arrived at Cairo the "Hedgehog" staff consisted of Colonel Dawnay, G.S.O.1, Captain Pratt Barlow, G.S.O.3, Major Wordie, D.A.Q.M.G., and Captain Bennett, staff captain. Dawnay was officially the chief staff officer, just as Joyce was officially the senior British officer with Feisal's army, but Lawrence really counted more than either of them with Allenby and Feisal, and used to flit backwards and forwards between G.H.Q. and Feisal's headquarters as the spirit moved him. I had been lucky to hit off one of his periodical flying visits to Cairo, and found that he, Dawnay and Wordie, were just starting off for Akaba. They decided that I should go with them and have a look round before settling down to any particular job, and the day after I arrived we all went down by train to Suez and embarked in the Khedivial steamer *Borolos* for Akaba.

As we steamed slowly down the Gulf of Suez and round the Sinai Peninsula Lawrence told me what the position was at that time. Feisal's headquarters



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were now at Aba'l Lissan, on the high limestone downs seventy miles inland from Akaba. His advanced troops were twelve miles farther north at a spring called Waheida, where they faced the Turkish outposts on Semna hill, which overlooks Maan. The Hejaz railway was running as far as Medina, subject to continual interruptions south of Tebuk by demolition parties from the Southern Hejaz forces, which were commanded by King Hussein's two elder sons, Ali and Abdullah, and still based on Wejh and Yembo. Feisal's Northern Arab Army, based on Akaba, now formed part of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force, under General Allenby, and it was their task to do what they could to co-operate in his main operations. A force of 17,000 Turks was imprisoned on the line south of Maan, and in Medina. If Feisal could capture and retain Maan, their last hope of rejoining the main Turkish Army would be lost, and General Allenby would be able to disregard them altogether, but with Maan still in Turkish hands there was always the bare possibility of Fakhri Pasha, the Turkish commander at Medina, making his way north with all his force and joining the Turkish Fourth Army at Amman, east of the Jordan. In addition to the 17,000 men pinned to the line from Maan to Medina there was a garrison of 3,000 at Maan itself, and another 3,000 or 4,000 keeping the railway open between Amman and Maan. Various detached Turkish forces were also garrisoning the hill-country between the Dead Sea and the railway-line, so that energetic action by Feisal in the neighbourhood of Maan would result in occupying from 20,000 to 25,000 Turks who might otherwise join in against General Allenby's right flank.

Feisal's regular army, which was recruited almost entirely from Arab prisoners of war who had been taken while fighting for the Turks in the various eastern theatres of war, and had volunteered to join the Arab revolt, was not more than 3,000 strong, including camp-followers and non-combatants. It was armed, clothed, munitioned, and rationed by General Allenby, but it had been for less than six months in being, and could not yet be regarded as a disciplined and up-to-date force. Besides being helped with munitions and rations, Feisal had been lent five armoured cars known as the Hejaz Armoured Car Battery, under Captain Gilman ; a flight of aeroplanes, under Captain Siddons ; two ten-pounder guns mounted on Talbot cars, under Lieutenant Brodie ; a detachment of twenty Indian machine-gunners, under Jemadar Hassan Khan of the 11th Tiwana Lancers ; a detachment of the Egyptian Camel Corps, under Bimbashi Peake ; a section of Algerian gunners, armed with four '65 mountain-guns under Captain Pisani ; and an Egyptian Army battalion for guard duties at Akaba. To help him with his transport, as he advanced farther from Akaba, he was also lent a company of the Egyptian Camel Transport Corps, under Captain Hinde.

These miscellaneous units were all under the command of Lieut.-Col. P. C. Joyce, who was not only O.C. Hejaz Operations from the point of view of the British units, but had also been Feisal's guide, philosopher, and friend for nearly two years. Next to Lawrence there was no one whom Feisal liked and trusted better than Joyce Bey, and no one who did more to make the Hejaz operations a success. Joyce's staff consisted of Major Maynard, his *alter*

*ego*, and second-in-command ; Major Marshall and Captain Ramsay, medical officers ; and Captain Hornby, R.E., Demolition expert. The base at Akaba was commanded by Major Scott, of the Royal Irish Fusiliers, ably seconded by Captain Goslett, A.S.C., who was combined Supply and Ordnance Officer, and Lieutenant Woods, R.E., Works Officer. Others drifted in and out, ciphering and deciphering telegrams, landing stores, pegging down wire roads in the sand, and doing a hundred other odd jobs, but these were the principal helpers when I first arrived. There was no very elaborate organisation, nor was one needed at this stage.

We reached Akaba on the third morning, and I saw for the first time the various camps dotted about on the sand-hills of the Wady Araba, the strings of camels coming down from the Wady Ittm, the aeroplanes rising from the aerodrome two miles away, and the squalid little streets of the tumble-down village, full of picturesque tribesmen from all parts of Western Arabia. Feisal could do nothing without the goodwill of the tribes. His arrival at Akaba, and the establishment there of a base which his British allies kept liberally supplied with rations and equipment of every kind, did as much to help his cause as his own exploits in the field. Akaba became a magnet for every needy sheikh or impoverished merchant of the hinterland. Flour and rice and sugar were doled out to all who professed to join the Sherifian cause, and there is little doubt that a certain amount of it found its way eventually to Damascus and the hungry Turks, for it was quite impossible to guarantee that supplies taken in the name of a friendly tribe were really

consumed by the men for whom they were intended. Arab though he was, Feisal experienced the same difficulty as we had experienced in Mesopotamia when he tried to limit the amount for any one tribe to anything like the correct figure. His position was not strong enough for him to take a firm stand with his adherents, who would have thought nothing of turning upon him and worrying his communications if he had tried to make their ration dependent on their services. I told him once of my friends at Nasiriyah and the success of a policy which I had introduced there of issuing passes in proportion to tribal quotas of labour, but he only laughed and said "*Ma yasir*" (Cannot be done).

Joyce was away, and we only stopped one night at Base Headquarters before going up-country. Leaving Wordie behind to talk to Scott and Goslett, Lawrence, Dawnay, and I packed ourselves next morning into two little Ford tenders, and set out for Aba'l Lissan. Five miles of fair going over the sand and pebbles of the Wady Araba took us to the well at the mouth of the Wady Ittm, which was the last water for thirty miles. After filling up our *fantasses* and water-bottles we turned into the pass, and ground and rattled our way up the boulder-strewn track. It had been raining the day before, and the wet drew out the many colours of the hills on either hand. Veins of black basalt running across the spurs of grey and rose-pink granite glistened like watered silk in the morning sun. The bottom of the gorge was in some places only a few yards wide. Every now and then we turned a corner where a low-lying spur jutted out across the valley and offered an ideal rear-guard position. At one of these places, one company

with two or three machine-guns could have stopped an army corps, yet it was down this gorge that Lawrence had ridden with Sherif Nasir and his three hundred Bedouin nine months before.

After three hours the pass broadened into the Guwera plain. The granite hills still persisted on the left-hand border of the amphitheatre, but on the right a new formation appeared. Great cliffs of sandstone stood up sheer from the sandy bottom, worn by wind and water into fantastic shapes, and winding in and out among them were stretches of level mud-flat over which a Rolls-Royce car could run for miles at almost any speed. The road ran straight for six or seven miles across the plain, skirting the left-hand border, to a solitary flat-topped outcrop of sandstone which overhung the Guwera post. Here were the aerodrome and the headquarters of the armoured-car battery, and we stopped for an hour to lunch and let the engines cool. We had hardly started again before it began to rain once more. Huddled under the tarpaulin in the back of the car, we bumped along another eighteen miles of heavy sand until we were brought up against the foot of the limestone plateau which forms the northern limit of the Guwera plain. Corkscrewing up a shoulder of this plateau is the Negab Pass, surely the worst bit of road that a car has ever been asked to climb. To look at it, one would say that it was quite out of the question, yet five Rolls-Royce armoured cars, four Rolls-Royce tenders, four Talbots, a Crossley, a Vauxhall, and innumerable Ford vans were pushed up it before the Hejaz operations were over. One of my most vivid recollections of my work at Akaba is the continual recurrence of this unpleasant duty. Even

to get the little Ford up, everyone had to get out and shove till his heart cracked, and all passers-by were pressed into the service. The commandeered Arab seldom stuck it out for long, but the Egyptian soldier or servant was indefatigable.

Rain was still falling, but it was not too wet for us to stop and look back at the wonderful view which greets you when you reach the summit of the Negab. Stretching away below for twenty miles lies the Guwera amphitheatre, with its blocks of sandstone cliff standing up from the level plain ; high above these on the farther side tower the ethereal mountains of Rum, their weathered peaks scoured white like snow ; and on the right you look right across over the granite hills of the Wady Ittm and the mysterious depths of the Wady Araba to the distant hills of Sinai.

In all the months that followed I was never in so great a hurry to get up or down the Negab—and I think I was always in a hurry—that I could not stop for a few minutes as we did that day to look at the view.

A five-mile run along the plateau brought us to Aba'l Lissan, where a few scattered tents in a fold of the boulder-strewn downs marked the headquarters of the Northern Arab Army. It was still pouring with rain, and all three of us were soaked. We huddled into Feisal's bell tent and squatted down dripping, Lawrence on the ground, Dawnay on a camp chair, and myself by Feisal's side on the camp bed. The middle of the tent floor, round the pole, was uncarpeted and strewn with cigarette butts. The rest of the floor was covered with rugs and matting, which our dirty boots soon covered with mud, to which even Lawrence contributed, as,

for once, he was in khaki, of which Feisal did not at all approve. After the usual coffee and greetings Feisal, Lawrence, and Dawnay plunged into a three-sided discussion, while I sat listening and studying the sensitive face of the young prince at my side. He was very simply dressed in a long brown *zibun*, rather like a cassock, and an embroidered kerchief was loosely knotted round his head, without any head-rope. The whole time he was talking his long slim fingers were busy with an amber rosary, chasing the beads nervously round the thread. As he leant eagerly forward and waited for Lawrence to translate Dawnay's carefully chosen sentences, he reminded me of some beautiful thoroughbred quivering at the starting-gate.

They discussed the possibility of the Turks attacking Waheida and Aba'l Lissan. A Sherifian force under Feisal's youngest brother Zeid had advanced to Kerak and Tafele in January, but the Turks had organised a counter-offensive and were driving them back. The question was whether the Arab force could hold its ground above Maan or whether it would have to fall back on Guwera. Partly to help the Arabs, and partly to distract attention from the Palestine coast, where he meant to advance in April, General Allenby had decided to make a raid across the Jordan against Amman and to break the railway there. This would be the time for the Arabs to isolate Maan, and he was anxious that they should hold their ground. Feisal was determined to stand fast if he possibly could, and sent for Ja'far Pasha, the G.O.C. of his Northern Army, who came in and sat down by Lawrence on the floor. Ja'far was an Iraqi Arab who originally commanded the Senussi against the British forces on



the western frontier of Egypt, was taken prisoner, broke his leg in attempting to escape from the Citadel at Cairo, and eventually volunteered to serve in the Arab Army, where he was at once made commander-in-chief of Feisal's force. Having studied in Germany, and speaking five languages, of which English was one, he was an ideal commandant in the field of the mixed elements, Hejazi, Syrian, and Mesopotamian, of which the newly formed Arab regular army was composed. He had at that time a black beard and a very violent temper, and used to burst out into torrents of bilingual and even trilingual abuse at the smallest provocation, but his anger never lasted, and all his men quite understood him. He was rather depressed that day, and not at all hopeful of being able to hold the Aba'l Lissan plateau, but Feisal's confidence was unshaken, and it was decided that the Arabs should stick to their positions at all costs.

After the conference Dawnay went back with Wordie to Cairo, and Lawrence disappeared up-country towards Shobek to see what had happened to Zeid. As it turned out, the Turks never took the offensive south of Maan, but merely held the railway and concentrated their efforts on keeping it open as far as Medina. Feisal was thus left undisturbed to organise his army and to make occasional sallies against a station or post on the line. His regular army was not yet strong enough to spare many detachments for this kind of work, so a good deal of it was done by the attached British officers and units, who acted independently of the official Arab headquarters, but in close touch with Feisal and Ja'far. Joyce and Maynard worked out and supervised all these independent affairs, most of

which were suggested or inspired in the first place by Lawrence.

When Dawnay went back, I was left at Akaba to wait for Joyce, who appeared a few days later. He suggested that I should take charge of the Indian machine-gunners, who were at the moment marooned at a desert oasis called Azraq, three hundred miles to the north, and possibly of some Arab Scouts who were expected from Palestine in about a fortnight. His idea was that if cars could get down to the Hejaz railway at Dhat al Haj, in the neighbourhood of Tebuk, something might be done with a small mixed force of two armoured cars, the Talbot ten-pounders, and the Indian and Arab Scouts when they were collected, but before this I was to go down by Ford with an armoured-car officer and reconnoitre the line to see if heavy cars could get there.

For a few days no cars could be spared for my reconnaissance, and I filled in the time by growing a beard and learning to ride a camel. On Lawrence's advice I went in for the Bedouin rather than the Egyptian style. The Bedouin saddle consists of two padded wooden frames which lie one on either side of the hump, and meet front and rear in two high pommels, from nine inches to a foot long. The saddle is held on by two girths, one passing round the camel's breast, and the other round her belly. As the hump sticks up above the side frames, it has to be covered by successive layers of pads, saddle-bags, fleeces, and rugs, at the rider's fancy. The lowest pad, of leather, and the strip of cloth which connects the two saddle-bags, have two round holes in them which fit over the pommels. The hardy Bedouin throws a fleece over these and is content,

but I did not find this enough, and used to unroll my valise and lay it across the saddle-bags, with a pillow lying lengthwise in the middle of it, just between the pommels. On top of this again came the soft fleece which experience has proved to be the least galling surface for the seat.

Lying on the camel's withers in front of the saddle is a semicircular pad on which the rider rests his legs. The leather bridle has a chain nose-band, and one long rope attached to this and brought up on the near side of the neck forms the only rein. The extreme end of this rope is usually knotted round the front pommel, so that if the rider wishes to have both hands free, it is always safely within reach. An indispensable adjunct to the Bedouin camel-rider is an ordinary bamboo cane with a curved handle. This is used not so much for a whip as for an extra rein with which the rider guides his mount by tapping her on the opposite side of the neck to the direction in which he wants her to go. The crook of the cane is also used as a fishing-rod if he has forgotten to hitch the rope to the pommel and is careless enough to let it slip out of his hand. As much as two golden sovereigns used to be given up-country during the War for one of these canes, which can be got in every Indian bazaar for eight annas.

The good camel-rider sits well forward in the fleecy nest between the pommels, with one leg crooked round the front pommel and the toes of that foot locked in the bend of the other knee. The free foot dangles over the camel's shoulder and kicks it gently when he wants her to start. It is essential to good Bedouin style that the arms should be kept bent at the elbow, both forearms sticking up

vertically, cane in one hand and rope in the other. Every muscle in the body must be relaxed, leaving it absolutely loose, and giving to the jog of the camel's trot. To make her increase her pace the rider ejaculates Hai ! in a kind of yodel, though she will probably answer to any loud cry if he kicks her shoulder at the same time. If he wants her really to move, he digs his bare toes into the ticklish parts between rib and elbow, reaches back his cane to her quarters, and draws the crook end of it smartly up her flank. To induce her to graze as she goes he says Clock ! Clock ! and to halt and lie down Ikh ! Ikh ! at the same time tapping the top of her neck smartly with his cane. The camel's most restful and pleasant pace is a kind of amble, head low and well out to the front, and long neck rippling in gentle waves. She will keep this up for hours. I never did anything like Lawrence's big rides, either for distance or for speed, the fastest trip I ever managed being thirteen miles in an hour and a half, and the longest seventy-four miles in seventeen hours' continuous riding.

When the rider dismounts he ties the end of the rope halter tightly round the camel's bent foreleg above the knee, to stop her running away. She will still manage to get up if she wants to, and it is quite a common sight to see the gentle beast wandering about on three legs with the doubled knee of the fourth sticking out helplessly in front, but she cannot wander far, and it is comparatively easy to catch her again when she is wanted. The best way to mount her is to put the hands on the tops of the two pommels, lift the body up on straightened arms, and pass the right leg over the middle of the saddle as quickly as possible. She is very apt to

begin the complicated series of motions involved in getting on to her legs the moment she feels a touch on the saddle, and unless the rider gets his right leg over quick, he will find himself in the air before he is ready. The *dhelul*, the she-camel of the desert, is a patient, sweet-tempered beast who will go on till she drops.

Lawrence himself had a splendid stable of first-class animals, and a body-guard of about twenty reckless spirits from all over the Hauran and Western Arabia. These men wore the most gorgeous robes and rode the finest *dheluls* that money could buy—and gold was nothing accounted of in the days of Lawrence. His own Arab wardrobe was of the most expensive and beautiful kind. He wore a pure white silk over-shirt and loose white pyjamas. Round his waist was a gold belt, in the front of which was a gold-hilted dagger in a curved gold scabbard, given to him by King Hussein. Over his shoulders he wore a soft *aba* of sheep's wool, with a deep embroidered yoke of gold or silver thread. The *sugs* of Cairo, Damascus, Baghdad, Najaf, and Hail were ransacked for the finest and most costly products of Arab workmanship. Feisal himself could boast no more splendid raiment than was worn by his friend Lawrence. The embroidered *kafiya* which does duty with the Arabs for hat, neckerchief, handkerchief, and table-napkin, was held in place by an *agal*, or head-rope of plum-coloured silk threads caught up at intervals by close rolls of pure gold wire. I once found my way to the little booth in the Cairo *sug* where Lawrence's *agal* had been made and explained that I wanted one like it, but found that it would cost fifty golden "guineas," forty-five of which were to be melted

down to make the gold wire, the remaining five being the workman's fees ; so I thought I had better wait until I had qualified myself a little better before asking to be allowed to spend this amount on what, after all, was only a hat-guard, and contented myself with a cheaper one.

Lawrence always wore sandals, kicking them off in proper Arab style when he came into a house or tent. His theory was that it was no good wearing Arab dress unless one not only wore the very best of everything, but wore it as an Arab would wear it. He made no attempt to pass for an Arab, except on a camel in the distance, for his clean-shaven, fresh-coloured face and blue eyes would have given him away at once, but by adopting Arab dress and customs he increased his influence with the Bedouin, who looked on Urans, as they called him, as a kind of white Sherif, second only to Sherif Feisal himself.

I realised at once that there was to be no question of my getting myself up in this style. What I had to do was to fit myself for any job that might be going, and to learn something about local conditions. All that was needed in the way of kit was to change my uniform helmet for the Arab head-dress worn by all British officers with the Arabs, and to wear an *aba* over my uniform. To tell the truth I was not at all anxious to risk being shot if I was captured by the Turks, and as there was no need for more than one white Sherif, I was quite content to do the same as all the other British officers. I have often been asked whether Lawrence could have done what he did if it had not been for his almost inexhaustible supply of golden "guineas," and I have always made the same

answer. Lawrence could certainly not have done what he did without the gold, but no one else could have done it with ten times the amount. No amount of pomp and circumstance would have won him the position he gained among the Arabs if he had not established himself by sheer force of personality as a born leader and shown himself to be a greater dare-devil than any of his followers. What the Arabs admired most in him was his utter disregard of danger and his readiness to endure not merely discomfort but the worst kinds of hardship. Not only did he beat them all at their own game, shoot straighter, ride harder, and eat and drink less, but he shone out among them in all the qualities which they would like to have possessed. Nothing seemed to give him greater pleasure than to squat down less than two hundred yards from the railway-line with an electric exploder tucked away under his *aba*, and to watch with complete unconcern the slow approach of a train full of Turkish soldiers, preceded by a small party of men examining the line for mines, electric leads, or tell-tale foot-prints. As soon as the engine was well over the undiscovered mine, he would jam down the knob of the exploder, retire to his waiting camel and ride away, hotly pursued by the fire of any soldiers who might have escaped from the rear carriages, and who had their wits about them enough to try to avenge their comrades. Other British officers did the same kind of thing, but not in the same grand manner, and they would be the first to admit it.

A week of camel-riding and beard-growing made me both sore and stubbly, and I was glad when the time came for me to disappear into the wilderness. Towards the end of March, Wade of the armoured

cars and I set out from Guwera in two Ford tenders, with the drivers and ten days' rations, to reconnoitre. Our way lay through the grazing-grounds of the Beni Atiya tribe, and it was necessary for our comfort and safety that Matlaq al Jumaan, the head of the tribe, should go with us. There was no room for him in the cars, which were already full to the brim with petrol, spare parts, tyres, and water. So we made a little camel caravan consisting of Matlaq, two of his followers, and one of Lawrence's camel-men with camels for Wade and myself, in case the cars got stuck. Our first day's run was along the baked mud-flats of Guwera, winding in and out among rose-grey masses of sandstone. The surface was quite perfect for motoring—hard and white and smooth and absolutely dead flat. There was not a sign of life anywhere, though Matlaq told us that we were being watched all the time from the crags by his nomad tribesmen. He was such a tiny little man that we made a nest for him in the folds of our bell tent, which had been laid as an afterthought on top of the mountain of cases and tins in the back of one of the cars. He beguiled the way with long stories of the country and the people, and more particularly of the fine deeds that his gallant tribe had done against the Turks. Remembering my experiences with the Dhafir at Nasiriyah, I was inclined to be a little sceptical about the fighting value of Bedouin tribes, but after what I had heard of Lawrence's performances I realised that I might be misjudging them.

Matlaq had one mysterious story of a place called Gareya, which apparently lay quite close to the place for which the party were making. One of his tribe, he said, had found himself one day in Al



Qahireh (Cairo). An English Qonsulos came up to him in the *suq* and said, "Oh! brother, art thou of the brave Beni Atiya?" He said, "I am." "Knowest thou Al Gareya, the ruined city in the mountains, eight hours' journey from the iron way?" "Yea, by God, I know it." "Take then this paper. Burn it on a flat stone which thou wilt find outside the great gate in the rock that no man has ever seen to open. Beat thrice upon the gate and it will open before thee. Within sits a huge negro of stone, his hands upon his knees. Fear him not, but walk boldly past him and thou shalt find treasure heaped within beyond all counting. Take from it what thou wilt for thyself, and return to me here upon a day to tell me what has befallen." Half doubting, the herd returned to his home, but when next he passed Gareya he bethought him of the English Qonsulos, and fished out the magic paper from his saddle-bag. He burnt it upon the flat stone and rapped thrice on the great stone door, which swung open to his knock, and he saw within the giant statue glaring at him from the gloom. Moved by unreasoning terror he fled to his camel, and rode away as if the devil were after him. The door clanged to behind him, and has never opened since.

Turning south-east from the mud-flats, we wound our way down a desolate valley of volcanic rock. The surface was of firm white sand coated with lava, which tore the tyres to pieces. Every evening when we halted Matlaq and his followers came to sit with us and drink tea or coffee. The little man begged us not to blame him if he took us by a bad route. "I know nothing of the ways of the trombeel" (automobile), he protested, "and I can only guess where she will be able to travel,"

but he was wonderfully intelligent. He used to start off on his camel at the first streak of dawn to prospect and report, and after the first day we confidently followed the round white pad-marks in the lava-strewn sand without waiting for him to come back. As we got nearer to the railway the surface became softer and softer. We skated over patches where Wade said that no armoured car could possibly follow, and more than once we had to unload the little cars at a particularly soft patch and ferry our stuff across on the camels. Sometimes we would dash at full speed in the hope of reaching firmer ground before momentum failed, and on one of these occasions my car skidded in the soft sand. I heard a little plaintive cry behind me, and saw poor Matlaq flying through the air. The little man was badly shaken, and preferred his camel for the rest of the journey.

When the cars could go no farther, we climbed on our camels to the top of a flat-topped hill about eight miles west of Dhat al Haj, and looked across at the distant line. It was my first sight of the Hejaz railway, and I found it difficult to realise that the little train which puffed slowly out of the station was full of enemies. It rather went to my heart to think of attacking the tiny creatures at all, they looked so forlorn in that desolate place, but we had only to look across from the top of the hill to see that our armoured-car plan was out of the question. All the way from our look-out post to the line were wind-swept billows of bright yellow sand, through which no armoured car could go, and there was nothing for it but to go back and report failure.

When we got back to Guwera on the 7th April we found that Joyce was ill at Akaba, and Maynard

was with Feisal at Aba'l Lissan. Lawrence was on the point of disappearing on one of his mysterious trips up-country, his object this time being, he told me, to blow up the great railway-bridge at Tel ash Shahab, ten miles west of Deraa on the Damascus-Haifa railway, where the line winds down the rocky gorge of the Yarmuk Valley. I have already pointed out that the section of the Hejaz railway from Medina to Maan was like a causeway built through the ocean, and this was to a lesser extent true of the section from Maan to Damascus. No Turk showed his nose more than two or three miles west of the line from Maan to Jurf al Derawish, or east of it from Maan to Damascus. The Arabs had, as it were, command of the sea. The whole way from Medina to Damascus they could ride backwards and forwards unmolested on the east of the line. It was only when they had to cross it, or tried to demolish it or to take a station, that they came in contact with the Turks at all. West of the line, from Jurf al Derawish northwards, this no longer applied. The Arabs between the line and the Dead Sea and Jordan Valley were more or less dominated by the Turks, and Turkish officials and garrisons were posted at all the important villages. Given a friendly sheikh as escort, there was no particular danger in riding right up as far as Damascus on the east of the line. The difficulty was to know which sheikhs were friendly, and the danger was that they might at any moment find it politic to ingratiate themselves with the enemy.

It may easily be imagined what courage it needed for a solitary Englishman to ride for the first time beyond the area which was known to be friendly to the Sherif and in which Feisal had special represen-

tatives, but Lawrence was absolutely without fear. He would start gaily off with his swaggering body-guard of Arab braves, bent not only on getting as far north as he could in the sea of desert which was out of reach from the Hejaz causeway, but on coming down either at night or in broad daylight to the causeway itself and blowing up a bridge or a train. Not content with this, he would even cross over into the more predominantly Turkish area on the west of the line, if he thought there was a chance either of gaining fresh adherents to Feisal's cause or of doing some damage to the enemy. Accompanied by Lieutenant Woods he had already been within an ace of blowing up the Tel ash Shahab bridge some months before. They were actually on the bridge, and waiting for the body-guard to bring along the explosive, when a Turkish sentry took alarm and fired blindly into the night. The men who were carrying the charges took fright and bolted, and Lawrence and his companion had to come away. He now proposed to try again—alone this time. If he was successful, or if he found that he could not manage any of the Yarmuk Valley bridges, his idea was to go still farther and have a try for a big bridge between Homs and Hama, more than a hundred miles north of Damascus.

One of the attractions of working with the Arab forces was the absence of any cut-and-dried programme. An idea would come to some officer, British or Arab, and if it seemed to offer any chance of success, one or more of the motley collection of improvised units would be commandeered and sent off to see what could be done. The force might be wholly British, wholly Arab, or mixed, but Lawrence was of course a law unto himself. He flitted back-

wards and forwards between General Allenby's G.H.Q. and Feisal's headquarters as the spirit moved him, and disappeared like a ghost with his band of desperadoes whenever he felt inclined.

Lawrence had hardly vanished when an American maker of cinema films came unexpectedly into the Guwera mess-tent. He was bitterly disappointed at missing the uncrowned king of Arabia, whom he had met in Cairo, and who had been prevailed upon to arrange for his flying visit to the Arab theatre of operations. He had perforce to content himself for the present with listening to the stories which were told him by the various British officers in the mess, and in working out a trip to Petra. I never saw him again and had no hand in the staging of his pictures, which were a triumph of journalistic composition; but they depicted only the earlier Lawrence of the heroic period, and wrongly credited him with doing single-handed the whole of the later work of "Hedgehog," and of Joyce and his British staff. I came too late, so that I practically never saw the real Elizabethan Lawrence, who characteristically drew back into his shell during that long period of preparation after the taking of Akaba. Like the Bedouin with whom he rode he held aloof from soldiers and everything they did. At the same time, it is bare justice to give him the chief credit for the whole series of Arab operations which ended in the setting up of Arab rule in Damascus. It may be true that, but for Dawnay and Joyce, only twenty or thirty Arab irregulars would have ridden with Allenby's cavalry into the Syrian capital instead of from six to seven hundred trained and equipped regular soldiers, and what they managed to do on the way might not have been of great

military importance. But they would have been there all the same, and it would have been to Lawrence's later inspiration as much as to his earlier achievements that their presence would have been due.

Dawnay was also at Guwera when Wade and I got back. He was on his way to Aba'l Lissan with the news that General Allenby's raid on Amman had been only partly successful, as his cavalry had been unable to hold the town. They had, however, made a good break in the line, under cover of which the Arabs ought to be able to get astride their own section, north of Maan. Allenby still proposed to advance along the coast in April, and Dawnay was to do his best to induce Feisal not to attack Maan until then, but when we got to Aba'l Lissan we found Feisal planning a direct attack on the very next day. At Dawnay's earnest request he called a conference of his commanders, and for over two hours a heated discussion raged. Feisal himself quite saw the force of Dawnay's arguments, and so did Ja'far, who strongly supported the original plan of attacking some point on the railway north of the town ; but his chief of staff, Nuri as Said (who is now Prime Minister of Iraq), and the majority of the other regular officers were all eager for a direct attack on Maan. In the end the firebrands were overruled, and the idea of a premature attack on the town was definitely abandoned, though events soon proved too strong for such prudent resolutions of postponement here and co-operation elsewhere. It was decided instead that a strong Arab force should get astride the line to the north, while the mixed British force which was to have attacked Dhat al Haj was now to be diverted

to the small station of Tel ash Shahm, between Maan and Mudawara.

Greatly to my disappointment I found that I was not to command this force after all. Various reasons were given for this : the Indian machine-gunners had not yet got back from Azraq, so that my Indian Army experience was no longer required ; I had been sent for to do Lawrentian stunts, not to command British units ; my knowledge of the language made me more useful with the tribes ; and so on. But the fact was that Dawnay was getting tired of only doing staff work at Cairo and wanted a little fun for himself, and who shall blame him ? I was to be attached to the force as liaison officer with my old friend Matlaq of the Beni Atiya, who had promised to bring a contingent of his tribe to co-operate. The duties of liaison officer were not very clearly defined, but I gathered that I would ride with the Bedouin and presumably join in the camel charge, or whatever it might be, which would finally annihilate the Turkish garrison. I managed to conceal my alarm at the prospect of being involved in Bedouin operations so soon, and meekly accompanied the reconnoitring party which set out across the mud-flats on the 12th April under Dawnay's efficient command.

There was nothing haphazard about Dawnay's arrangements. Everything was done on the most approved Staff College lines. The subordinate commanders and the prospective liaison officer were conducted with every circumstance of military precaution to the summit of a rocky hill from which they looked down upon the line and the doomed station. Gun sites, times for aeroplane co-operation, lines of approach for armoured cars, successive

positions for the E.C.C., even the general direction of the Beni Atiya camel charge were planned out in the utmost detail. As I looked down from the hill to which we had been conducted at the little group of buildings with its water-tower, and the tiny figures of the twenty Turkish soldiers who formed its garrison moving unsuspectingly about their lawful occasions, I could not help feeling that it was really not quite fair of Dawnay to make such up-to-date and elaborate plans for their destruction. Perhaps I knew in my heart of hearts that I should not have done it nearly so well myself : or perhaps I was only thinking of that camel charge.

But I need not have worried myself about the camel charge. When we got back to Guwera on the 14th, we found a message from Matlaq to say that he intended to attack Tebuk, unsupported, with the brave Beni Atiya, and would not therefore be able to co-operate at Tel ash Shahm after all. My last excuse for joining the force was thus removed, and I was left at a loose end. Dawnay could only suggest that I should join Maynard at Aba'l Lissan and wait for another opportunity. As I sat in the mess-tent listening to him making his plans, I rather glumly wondered whether I should ever get anything to do at all. It seemed to me that I was falling between two stools, as I was clearly not wanted to understudy Lawrence, and the alternative of commanding a mixed force was also to be taken from me. Suddenly we heard a tremendous fusillade from the direction of the Arab post at Guwera rock, a mile away. In a very few minutes a breathless Arab rushed into the camp yelling at the top of his voice : " We have taken Maan ! Our Lord Feisal has taken Maan ! Praise be to God ! "



We rushed to the tent door and hurried over to the rock, which was surrounded by an excited crowd, dancing and singing, and firing thousands of live rounds into the air. Ducking our way through the rain of joy-bullets we managed to reach the Arab telephone, and found out after much delay that not Maan but its outpost Semna had been taken.

I joined Maynard at Aba'l Lissan next day, and found to my surprise that Lawrence had come back. Whether something had gone wrong with his plans, or whether the British withdrawal from Amman was as unexpected to him as it certainly was to Feisal, he had apparently given up all idea of trying to blow up one of the big bridges in the north. I had no opportunity at the moment of discussing my own plans with him, as the air was full of schemes for attacking Maan. Semna was a very strong natural position on a high limestone ridge overlooking the town. It had fallen so easily and at such small cost, that the Arabs underestimated the difficulty of carrying the much stronger defences of Maan itself. That same night Feisal received a petition signed by all his officers, in which he was implored to allow the sons of the Arab to hurl themselves against the Turkish trenches. It was clearly useless for him or anyone else to expostulate or to bring forward the old arguments again. Against his better judgment he yielded to their importunity, and on the 16th April the town was attacked in force.

Lawrence, Maynard, and I sat under a bivouac sheet with Feisal nearly all day on the highest point of Ain Waheida, looking across at Semna and the town beyond. Fighting with the utmost gallantry the little Arab force penetrated right into the station

buildings, but a strongly fortified hill overlooking the station defied all their efforts. All night they lay in the positions they had won, and renewed the attack next day. I rode down with Feisal and Zeid to watch the attack from the newly won heights of Semna, while Lawrence and Maynard went with the two French mountain-guns on the right. The Arab army again fought magnificently, but they lost very heavily; gun ammunition ran out; the Bedouin horsemen failed to co-operate: and as evening fell the attack was abandoned.

It is easy to be wise after the event, especially when, as a matter of fact, one has also been wise before it, but it is hard to blame Feisal for having been carried away by his success at Semna and by the appeals of his officers. No one could have fought more bravely than his regulars did that day, and if there had only been a few more of them and the guns had had a few more rounds of ammunition he would have been justified in playing for the larger stake. As it was there was nothing to be done but to sit down and recuperate, and evolve some new scheme. A small ray of light in the gloom was Dawnay's Tel ash Shahm operation. Two stations were taken in fine style and a break made in the line which was never afterwards repaired. It only remained to do the same thing north of Maan for the whole Turkish force on the Hejaz railway to be put permanently out of action.

## CHAPTER VII

### GUNS (WAHEIDA, 1918)

Plan for attack on Jurf al Derawish. Misadventures on camel-back. Demolitions. Auda abu Tai. Camp at Musheyish. Marzuq writes to General Allenby. Abdullah abu Saleh. Crossing the line. Guns for Towana. Capture of Abu Jerdun. Sherifian and Bedouin delays. Second attack on Abu Jerdun. Makik

AFTER the failure of the attack on Maan, Lawrence and I discussed what should be my next step. In the end we arranged that a small force should be left at Waheida and Semna to contain Maan, while a strong detachment under Nuri should move north up the line and attack Jurf al Derawish. I was to go with Nuri, and as soon as Jurf had been taken I was to be given two guns to help me to do any damage I could still farther to the north. The local Bedouin were in this case the Beni Sakhr tribe of Trans-Jordan, whose sheikhs were at that time in charge of a Sherifian representative called Marzuq al Takheimi at a water-hole in the desert some hours north-east of Jurf. My first job was to co-ordinate Marzuq's and Nuri's operations, and to ensure the Bedouin attacking Jurf at the same time as Nuri's detachment. This meant that I must be free to ride from one to the other, and be independent of both for transport and supply.

Lawrence came back with me to Aba'l Lissan to explain the plan to Feisal, and when it had been approved he gave me three camels and two of his own body-guard who happened to be with him, the rest being at Musheyish with Marzuq. He then

went back in the Ford tender to Waheida, leaving me with my new companions, Zeid and Rahayil. My beard had by now blossomed out in true Arab style, with moon-shaped bald patches on either side of a small imperial, and a ragged fringe round the chin ; my face was burnt a rich mahogany, and I looked so much like a rather seedy Bedouin that Arab dress, except of the most gorgeous kind, would have reduced me to a nonentity. I had still done nothing to justify gorgeousness, even if I had felt inclined for it or Lawrence had encouraged it, so I decided to stick to my uniform. I also laid in some tins of Maconachie and other European groceries, as I had not developed Lawrence's taste for the food of the country.

When my preparations were complete I mounted my camel and set out for Waheida, as I thought it better to begin my real camel-riding while I was still in reach of civilisation, in case of a breakdown. I was by no means an expert camel-rider, for my rides at Akaba had been on a different camel, and so long ago that I had forgotten a good deal. We had not gone more than a hundred yards before I felt that something was wrong with the saddle, so I called Zeid, and explained that I could not go on without the saddle being adjusted. Zeid was very much amused. I had been introduced to him as the *Zābit*, or officer, which on Lawrence's lips was a slightly disparaging description, and he was inclined to be impertinent, but he graciously agreed to alter the saddle a little, and we started again. Just before leaving the camp I looked in at Feisal's tent to say good-bye and to get his last instructions, and when I came out again I found that my escort had disappeared. Thinking they had gone on, I set

out on the easy stage from Aba'l Lissan to Waheida, about twelve miles along a very good road which had been made by the Turks before the capture of Akaba.

It is much less tiring to trot than to walk on a camel, and I determined to trot the whole way. I was still not convinced that the saddle was right, as I seemed to be thrown forward far too much for comfort, but I managed to get within half a mile of Waheida without any accident. Then a particularly frantic effort to hitch myself into a more comfortable position resulted in my dropping the bridle rope. As I had of course forgotten to knot it round the pommel, it trailed down on the ground, and while I was fishing for it with the crook of my cane, my camel put her foot upon it and fell on a patch of stones, shooting me over her head. I picked myself up slowly and looked rather nervously at her. I had never mounted a camel alone, but had always had someone to stand on her doubled foreleg to prevent her rising too soon, and I felt rather inclined to walk the rest of the way ; but she chewed the cud at me so placidly that I plucked up courage and managed to scramble into the saddle again before she got on to her legs. The rest was easy, but I was a rather dejected *Ḥābit* when at last I rode alone into Waheida, for I had seen nothing of my two followers. Luckily for me I found Lawrence almost at once, and showed him the saddle, which turned out to be broken, and to have been broken for some time. He was very angry that I had been let down, and when the gorgeous Zeid came swaggering in with the camel-boy an hour later, he dismissed him on the spot, which was a great satisfaction to me. By good fortune we were able to buy

a new saddle in Waheida, and at six in the evening I started off again, with only the camel-boy this time, to catch up Nuri's detachment, which had already moved off in the direction of Jurf.

My new companion, Rahayil, was an ignorant camel-herd who knew nothing of the world except the habits and needs of camels, but he was a very fine tracker, and led the way without difficulty along the track left by the detachment, which was quite invisible to me. It was dark by the time we found the camp, and I was lucky to hit off the tent of Pisani, the commander of the French Algerian gun detachment, who entertained me with his usual hospitality. He told me that the detachment was to attack a post five miles south of Abu Jerdun at dawn the next morning, and to complete the destruction of two large bridges which had been partly demolished a fortnight before during the preparations for the unsuccessful attack on Maan. We were to start at two in the morning, and after capturing the post and destroying the bridges, were to cross the line to a place where Auda abu Tai, the sheikh of the Howeitat, reported that there was plenty of water for the force. Here we would halt for the night, and move on next day to the hills east of the line above Jurf al Derawish station, which was not open to attack from the west.

At two o'clock I was woken by the French sentry, and given a good cup of the hot coffee which was kept on tap all night in the French lines for sentries and stray visitors. Pisani and I hung about till half-past three, when, as there was no sign of movement, I went over to Nuri's tent and asked what had happened. "Well," said Nuri, "it is a most unfortunate thing, but we have no guide who can

show us the way to the railway. I do not want my guns to be caught in bad country in the dark, so I am going to wait for dawn before starting." I expressed polite surprise that no guide had been provided, and suggested that use should be made of Lawrence's braves, who must, I imagined, know the country inside out. Nuri accepted gratefully, so I sent for Rahayil and promised him a present if he would lead the detachment by a good way to the post that we were to attack. To my disappointment he protested that though he could have found the way by daylight, he would not undertake to guide guns there by night, and declined to have anything to do with it. As the difficulty seemed only to be that he did not know what kind of country guns could go over, I told Nuri that Rahayil and I would guide the column somehow, he finding the general direction and I correcting it if the going looked too bad for the guns.

We started off at about four, and succeeded in bringing the guns to the proper position. Some time was then wasted while Nuri wrote out his orders for the attack on the post which guarded the bridges. After two hours' bombardment and a cautious advance on up-to-date lines by the Sherifian infantry, the post was occupied without casualty. Only one Turk was found in it, the rest of the garrison having sneaked away into Abu Jerdun during the bombardment, and he was taken prisoner. The Bedouin irregulars who had attached themselves to the force were quite useless, reserving themselves for a dash into the post when all resistance was over, and a first dip into whatever lucky-bag might be found there.

As soon as the post had fallen, we proceeded to

demolish the two bridges. One of these had just been patched up by the Turks, who had built up a framework of wooden sleepers from the bed of the wadi to take the roadway. Some well-meaning person set fire to these, and made a glorious blaze, but the fire was so hot that no one could get near enough to do permanent damage to the stonework. The other bridge had not been damaged before, and it was now blown right away. Lawrence had discovered that the bridges on the Hejaz railway were all built to one pattern, and that in every case the drainage gutter ran out at the spring of the arch, offering an ideal bed for an explosive charge. I happened to remember this, and after seeing two charges buried in the permanent way from above and exploded without result, I ventured to point it out to the Arab sapper in charge of the demolition party. Lawrence's plan was tried, and this time the whole bridge was shorn off at the spring of the arch as clean as a rasher of bacon, and slid rumbling in a cloud of dust into the water-course below.

We then crossed the line and marched till five in the afternoon in search of Auda's water-hole, but unfortunately it had dried up, and Nuri was at last forced to halt without water. He was very angry, and made some bitter remarks about Bedouin in general and Auda in particular, which did not however help us much. At last he decided to cross to the west of the line again and stay at Fagieh, eight miles west of Abu Jerdun, until he got more reliable reports of the water on the east of the line. I asked him if he proposed to send anybody to Auda to clear up the mistake, but again he had no one in his camp who knew the way. When I once more



volunteered to produce a guide, Rahayil again disappointed me, and I had in desperation to offer to go myself. Promises of large rewards brought out a number of Bedouin who knew the way, and I started off at ten o'clock at night to ride to the Al Jafar depression where Auda was encamped. I arranged with Nuri before I started that as soon as I had found out for certain where the water was I would send him one guide, and go myself with another guide to the water-hole. Unless I found when I got there that there was not enough water and came across to stop him, he was to start with his own guide early next morning.

I did not succeed in finding Auda that night, and had to camp in the desert till daylight, but I soon found him in the morning, and taxed him with having let us down badly the day before. He protested that it was not his fault, as he had sent a reliable guide to accompany the column, and professed not to understand how he could have failed to arrive. This was quite untrue, the fact being that Auda was in the sulks. His men had not borne their share in the attack on Maan, and Lawrence had let him see pretty plainly what he thought of them. Lawrence and I were sitting in Feisal's tent when Auda came in on the day after the attack had finally failed. He called out "*Marhaba, ya Urans*" (Greeting, O Lawrence), and was answered with "*Marhabat al bariha, ya Auda*" (Greetings for yesterday evening, Auda), whereupon he left the gathering without ceremony, and went back to his tents in a huff.

I had forgotten this at the time, and was completely taken in, for the old man was as courteous and hospitable as a sheikh could be. He even

pressed an ostrich egg upon me, and of course slew a couple of sheep in my honour. He also promised to send Nuri such a good guide to the water east of the line that it would be quite unnecessary for me to meet the detachment there, so I decided to lose no time but to ride straight on to Marzuq at Musheyish, and arrange with him for the combined attack on Jurf in two days' time. I wrote a line to Nuri, explaining what I was doing, and Auda promised to send it off at once by hand of the very good guide. When I met Nuri again a week later, he told me that neither guide nor letter had ever reached him, but no doubts crossed my mind at the time, and I set off with Rahayil quite happily the same afternoon. Our way lay for seventy miles over a desolate and waterless desert, and we could not hope to reach Musheyish that night. Luckily we fell in with a few Bedouin, who entertained us with sour milk and a huge platter of rice boiled in clarified butter. Seeing that I was a stranger and not very expert at licking my fingers clean after the meal, they insisted with true Bedouin hospitality on washing them with the last few drops of their own treasured drinking water.

Next morning Rahayil guided me straight to the little encampment at the Musheyish water-hole, where Marzuq had collected the sheikhs of the Beni Sakhr. I was greeted with open arms by Lawrence's body-guard, who were much amused when they heard of Zeid's discomfiture. I felt that I had quite won my spurs by now, though my *Zābit's* uniform and my tins of Maconachie did not quite fit into the picture. Marzuq told me that he had sent over a small party of Beni Sakhr sheikhs from Madeba to General Allenby's G.H.Q. with a letter

saying that he only needed a little assistance from the British to destroy the entire Turkish Army east of the Jordan.

"Who knows?" he said. "They may send us some cavalry and guns. Then will I march up the railway-line, taking station after station even as far as Deraa." I was surprised to hear that Marzuq had taken it upon himself to write to General Allenby on his own responsibility, and could not think that much attention would be paid to his message. I told him that Nuri was on his way with four guns to attack Jurf al Derawish, and that when Jurf was taken two guns were to be handed over to us. We would then march, *insha' Allah*, not only to Deraa, but even to Damascus. Marzuq was politely incredulous. "They will never come," he said. "But, my dear fellow," I protested, "they are actually on their way. I have only just left them." "I will believe it when I see them," said he.

We waited for two days for news of Nuri, but none came, and on the 29th April one of the Beni Sakhr sheikhs came back from G.H.Q. He brought a letter purporting to come from General Allenby, in which he said that he hoped to co-operate with Marzuq, and that the bearer would give necessary details. According to the bearer, General Allenby proposed to advance on Shunet Nimrin on the very next day. Mounted troops were at the same time to attack and capture Salt, and the Beni Sakhr were to rise immediately and join in. Marzuq was much perplexed by this letter. He had acted without any authority in sending across to General Allenby without orders from Feisal, and was rather frightened at the result of his move. He knew perfectly well that the Beni Sakhr would do nothing without

guns, and no guns had arrived. I was as much perplexed as he was. My orders were to play up and down the line with the Beni Sakhr as soon as the guns arrived. Not a word had been said about British co-operation, and I was more than sceptical about the verbal message. In the end, Marzuq decided not to move the Beni Sakhr to join the British without orders from Feisal, and sent a fleet messenger to Aba'l Lissan for orders.

Two more days passed without anything happening, and on the 1st May I determined to ride back myself and find out the cause of the delay. Lawrence's headman, Abdullah abu Saleh, announced his intention of coming with me, and brought a deaf Haurani peasant and a camel-boy to complete the party. I was rather nervous with Abdullah, who was a great swell with his flowered cassock, light-blue Zouave jacket with black braid, and *aba* of soft sheep's wool. His long corkscrew ringlets shone with hair grease, and his saddle trappings hung almost to the ground in festoons of red and white webbing. He quite took charge of our movements, and we rode for no less than six hours at a steady walk, till I was nearly dead with fatigue and boredom. We then descended for the night upon an encampment of Bedouin, who again entertained us nobly. Next morning when I ventured to suggest that we should go a little faster, Abdullah was pleased to assent, and we fell into a steady jog-trot which we kept up till well on in the afternoon.

All through our ride we were conscious of the line, which lay like a sleeping dragon a few miles to our right. We had no idea what Turkish patrols might be guarding it, and to cross it in broad daylight with only three companions was a very

different thing from sweeping bravely over it with horse, foot, and guns as I had done a week before. When the time came, we barracked our camels in a small depression some two hundred yards from the point where we had decided to cross, and then crawled to the top of a little rise to prospect.

There was not a sign of movement anywhere. The rails twinkled peacefully in the sun, and the long line of telegraph poles shimmered in the haze. Two miles away on our right rose the black rock which stands out of the plain over Aneiza railway-station, where we knew that the Turks had a look-out post commanding the line for miles in either direction ; but this did not worry us so much as the fear that a patrol might be lying in wait for us behind the embankment. After one last searching look through our glasses we crawled back to our camels, mounted, and dashed for the line at full speed, hardly daring to look to right or left. A wild scramble brought us on to the embankment, where we found to our relief that no one was in sight. The reaction from the tension of the last five minutes showed itself in childish boastings and bravado. " We are on the line ! " we shouted, slipping off our camels and spurning the prostrate dragon with kicks and triumphant abuse. " God's curse on thee and on thy father ! " we shouted. " God's curse on the Turks ! God give the victory to our Lord Feisal ! " Snatching their rifles from the pommels, Abdullah and the Deaf One blazed away at the insulators. As the long festoons of wire jangled on to the ballast I leaped upon them and cut them with my wire-cutters. We felt that we were the finest and most daring men alive, until the inevitable scare that a train was coming sent us

flying in unreasoning terror to our camels again. Once more we urged them to their utmost speed, but with no such catching of the breath this time. Abdullah showed off his wonderful riding by hurling himself off in mid-career and scrambling up again by his patient animal's tail, while I bumped along in acute discomfort, hoping that the wild rush would soon give way to a more ordered and leisurely procedure. As soon as we realised that there was no train anywhere near, we steadied down and jogged comfortably on to Fagieh, which we reached in time for the midday meal.

To my astonishment, I found that Nuri's force had settled down, and that he was sending for tents. He had apparently given up any idea of going farther north, and was talking of nothing but the possibility of taking and capturing Abu Jerdun Station. This was not at all what we had arranged, but it was no good arguing with Nuri, so I rode straight on to Aba'l Lissan the same afternoon and saw Feisal, who expressed great annoyance that the original plan was not being carried out. He offered to give me a written order for Nuri, but I managed to induce him to come himself in a car to Fagieh, bringing Ja'far with him. Here we had a long discussion which resulted in a solemn promise that in five days' time the guns would be ready for me at Towana, west of Jurf al Derawish. Not yet having learnt my lesson, I left Fagieh at midnight for Musheyish to tell Marzuq, and to get him to bring the Beni Sakhr to the new rendezvous. I found him in great distress at the conflicting reports which reached him from day to day about the British raid on Salt. At one moment we actually started north on the strength of a message from Feisal which was

itself based on an out-of-date telegram from General Allenby's headquarters. But when we had gone a few miles we heard definitely that the British had withdrawn from Salt, and as it was now the 8th May, it seemed that the only thing we could do was to join the guns at Towana, and go back to our original plan.

Marzuq seemed doubtful whether the guns would be at Towana, and all my protests that there could be no real question about it after the promises which had been made to me by Feisal and Ja'far did not convince him. As he refused to make any move, I arranged to cross the line again and ride back through Towana, along the route which the guns must follow. I was to turn back with them whenever I met them, or at any rate to get them started if they had not actually started already. An old sheikh of the Beni Sakhr rode with me, who was supposed to be showing the way, but I saw to my surprise that he was not making for the railway at all, but keeping well away to the east of the line. When I pointed out that this would not suit me, as I was to go through Towana to meet the guns, he looked at me pityingly and asked whether I really thought that the guns had started. I said I supposed so. He said: "I will take all responsibility for your missing the guns if they have indeed started. Let us go down the east of the line, as it is much better going, and we shall get to Fagieh earlier that way."

We crossed the line just by Abu Jerdun and arrived at Fagieh late that night, only to find that the old man was perfectly right. Not only had the guns not started, but there was apparently no prospect of their starting at all, the difficulty being

that the regular army would not hand over their guns to the Bedouin without an escort of a hundred Sherifian soldiers. These soldiers had to be mounted on camels, which had been promised by Feisal but not produced, and even if they had been produced would have been of no use as there were no saddles for them.

I now saw clearly that it was useless for me to go on ahead and expect the guns to follow, so I rode again to Waheida to see Feisal. He told me that there was to be another attack on Abu Jerdun next day, which was the first of the Arab month. He promised that my guns should in no case be taken for this, and that they would certainly be ready to start on the 12th. At the same time he showed me a message left for me by Lawrence on the 3rd, which held out hope of British co-operation with us if only we could get some kind of force started up the line with guns. Imagining that this plan still held good, as there was no later telegram to contradict it, Feisal had sent the message which reached Marzuq at Musheyish, and was now arranging that Sherif Násir, with at least four different Bedouin tribes and four guns, should start up the line without delay. He told me that Násir and the Bedouin were in camp at Udhreh, half an hour from Fagieh, where the guns would join them next evening, and suggested that we should all start together on the 12th.

Things now seemed to be moving, and I arranged to drive out next day to watch the attack on Abu Jerdun, joining Násir in the evening at Udhreh, where the whole force was to be collected. I looked in to say good-bye to Feisal, who greeted me with a half-comical apology. "It is most un-



fortunate," he said, " but there has been a mistake in the day. To-day is really the 1st of the Arab month, as last month had only twenty-nine days in it, but the Bedouin are convinced that there were thirty days in last month, and that to-day is, therefore, the 30th. I much regret that we shall not be able to attack Abu Jerdun now until tomorrow, but please God you will certainly start off next day."

It was no good protesting, so I stayed in Waheida that day, and drove off in the motor next morning, the 12th, to Fagieh again. The attack on Abu Jerdun was brilliantly successful, and everybody was so pleased with himself that nobody worried much about me or my guns. When Nuri and Zeid returned from the battle, which they did at about noon, I went and talked to them for a little, and found to my disgust that neither of them had had any orders at all. In any case they refused to send more than two guns, and even these two could not start because the camels and saddles which Feisal had promised for the escort had not yet arrived, and they only had eighty beasts for a hundred men. I was determined not to be defeated, so I got on my camel again and rode back to Aba'l Lissan the same evening, where I found Feisal in great delight at the successful operation of the day and full of more voluble promises than ever about the camels and the saddles. He even went so far as to telephone to Akaba, seventy miles away, for twenty camels to be started off immediately from there to complete the required number. I felt bound to interpose here and to point out that General Allenby was presumably awaiting his co-operation, and that it would be difficult for me to explain that fourteen

days' delay had been caused owing to Sherif Feisal being unable to procure twenty camels.

Feisal was struck by this argument, and immediately purchased twenty camels from my old friend Auda abu Tai, who had got as far as Aba'l Lissan during these twenty days, in preparation, I suppose, for his attack on Jurf. The next difficulty was that no saddles could be found, but I managed to borrow them from Peake's detachment, which happened that day to be at Aba'l Lissan. I also got Joyce to agree that Peake and Hornby, who had just come in from a demolition south of Maan, should join us at Udhreh.

Next morning I saw Auda's twenty camels loaded with the hundred saddles, which were to be distributed among other camels waiting for them at Waheida, and sent them off. Then I saw Peake and Hornby start, and after them again I myself started in the Ford car, delighted to think that this time, at least, I had left nothing behind. After passing Peake and Hornby, who gave me a cheery wave, I caught up the twenty camels, which promptly took fright, never having seen a car before, and lumbered away to all points of the compass, their loads falling off in every direction. I had to send horsemen back from Waheida to salve the wreckage, and it was midnight before they succeeding in collecting fourteen camels and eighty saddles, which Ja'far said would be enough. As it was then too late to collect the company of infantry, I arranged for a start at dawn and settled down in Ja'far's tent for the night.

When Ja'far woke up at about seven I told him that the company had not yet started. After asking God to curse their fathers two or three times, he

sent a messenger to hurry them up. The messenger came back at about nine saying that the detachment had not had its pay, and Ja'far promised that they should be paid when they arrived at Fagieh. At about ten, another messenger came to say that eighty saddles were not enough, and Ja'far made up the number from some mysterious private store of his own. At eleven a third messenger came to represent that as the victorious Sherifian Army was on its way to join General Allenby, it would be as well if each man were given a new pair of trousers. Another hour was spent in issuing a new set of clothes all round, and at twelve o'clock they actually started. Peake and Hornby had already gone on to Udhreh, where Násir and the Bedouin and the guns were waiting, so that after a meal with Ja'far I started off, feeling again that my whole army was in front of me and that with any luck we should start from Udhreh the following day.

I arrived at Fagieh in the evening, and found that the company had not yet arrived there, and would not be able to get on to Udhreh the same night. So I arranged with Nuri that they should be sent on next morning along the direct road to Towana, where Násir and Peake and I and the guns would join them. Then I mounted my faithful camel and rode on in the dusk to Udhreh to tell Násir that all was now ready. Násir was delighted to hear that the company had at last started, but seemed surprised when I suggested that we should set out on the following day. "Are we to start like this, alone?" he said. I did not understand.

"Are we not to wait for the Bedouin?" he asked.

"But they are all here, are they not?" said I.

He clicked his thumbnail against his teeth in the expressive gesture of the Arab, and told me that he had not a single man with him except his own thirty followers. This was an unexpected blow. I quite realised by now that to get guns and a regular escort out of the Sherifian Army needed a certain amount of patience, but it had never struck me that there was any chance of the Bedouin not being ready. There was nothing to be done but to go back once more to Feisal and find out what prospect, if any, there was of the Bedouin ever starting. After a hurried meal with Peake I rode back again in the dark to Fagieh. I found out from Nuri that the company had actually arrived in the meanwhile, and most unwisely told him that there had been an unexpected delay and that Sherif Násir would not be starting next morning. "God has brought you," he cried. "The accursed Turks are again in Abu Jerdun, but I propose to drive them out the day after to-morrow, and should be grateful for the loan of your camels to take water to the attacking force."

Foreseeing at least two more days' delay for my Bedouin, I agreed to this, on the understanding that the camels should bring the company without fail to Dosag, a rendezvous on the Towana road, by nightfall on the second day. I also promised Nuri to get him aeroplanes and armoured cars to co-operate in the attack on Abu Jerdun, and arranged that I myself, with Peake, Hornby, and the guns, even if no Bedouin had turned up by that time, would make a simultaneous diversion north of Aneiza, cutting the line and firing the guns, whether we had a target for them or not. The result of this

would be, I hoped, that the garrison of Aneiza would be in doubt which way to send reinforcements, and in any case one or other of our objects would be gained. I sent off a note to Peake explaining this, and took a Ford to Aba'l Lissan at dawn next day.

When I gave Feisal Násir's letter, in which he said that he was not going to start until the Bedouin were actually with him, Feisal was furious. "One would think," he said, "that Násir had never had any dealings with Bedouin in his life ! Surely he knows that even if he sat for five months at Udhreh not a single one of the Bedouin would join him and that he must himself start first. Have the kindness, O Young !" he said, "to take him this letter, which will put everything right."

I took the letter, and went on to arrange for the cars and aeroplanes for Nuri. Then I drove back with Feisal's brother Zeid to Fagieh. Two miles beyond Waheida the Ford broke down, but luckily the armoured cars came by and Zeid and I got a lift in one of them. It was decided, however, that the extra weight of my valise would be too much for the armoured car. I pointed out that I was just starting on a fortnight's trip up-country on a camel, and that my valise formed the padding on which I rode, but the armoured-car officer was adamant, and I had to leave it by the side of the road in the charge of a passing Arab. We arrived at Fagieh to find Nuri just starting off into a position of readiness for next day's attack. He was delighted with me when he saw the armoured cars and heard that the aeroplanes had been arranged for, so I took him aside for a moment before he went off, and implored him whatever he did not to fail to send the camels

to the rendezvous by nightfall the following night. He seemed a little shy of the subject, but said that by God's grace both the camels and the company would return from his operations in time to get there.

"The company?" I asked.

"Yes," he said. "I am making use of the company too, as they happen to be here."

This was a very different thing from borrowing camels for a few hours to take water, but it was no good to fuss, as they had actually gone off, and I went back into Nuri's tent to stay for a little with Zeid before riding on to Udhreh. After about five minutes an officer came in and saluted Zeid. "Nuri Bey's compliments," he said. "He would be glad if Your Highness would order the guns which are now with Sherif Násir at Udhreh to come back here at once and join in the attack on Abu Jerdun to-morrow."

"Certainly not," said Zeid, looking rather nervously at me. "Those guns are Násir's guns, and Feisal has told Násir that he must march without fail to-morrow. Go and tell Nuri that I will in no case order Násir's guns to join him here."

Armed with Feisal's letter to Násir and secure in the presence of Peake, Hornby and the guns at least, with the prospect of the company joining us the same night, I rode again for the last time to Udhreh, where I arrived just as it was getting dark.

Feisal's anger at Násir's letter was nothing to Násir's anger at Feisal's. "Are we infants," he cried, "to be played with like this? O scribe! take pen and paper and write to our Most Noble Lord Sherif Feisal: After due greetings, I have received your honoured letter, and beg to inform

you that I will start as ordered to-morrow morning with my thirty followers, for I have with me neither guns, infantry, nor Bedouin. I will march to Dosag, and from Dosag to Hasa, and from Hasa to Towana, and from Towana to hell ! But I promise that you shall not again have cause to write and ask me why I am sitting doing nothing when I ought to be marching to the wars."

I was prepared for almost anything by now.

"What is this you say about the guns ?" I asked.

"The guns ?" he said. "The guns left here seven hours ago."

"Where did they go to ?" I asked.

"Back to Fagieh," he answered, "by order of Nuri Bey."

"Oh no ! Surely you must be mistaken," I replied. "I only left Fagieh half an hour ago, where I saw Nuri. He tried to get Zeid to order the guns back, but Zeid refused to do so."

"I know nothing about that," said Násir. "I only know that they left here seven hours ago."

I then gave it up. My last ride from Fagieh to Udhreh on the hard saddle without any padding had done internal damage which put camel-riding out of the question for some time, and in any case I had had enough. Rolling myself up in some of Peake's blankets I went to sleep and forgot my troubles. Having nothing better to do next morning I rode across at a walk to watch the attack on Abu Jerdun. I found Zeid sitting on the top of a high hill overlooking the station, and joined him there. He was very sympathetic when I poured out my woes to him, but I have no doubt that he wondered inwardly what all the fuss was about. No Arab has any idea of the value of time, and to ride five hun-

dred miles on a camel, as I had done, crossing the line four times, and spending a hundred hours in the saddle, must have seemed an amazingly silly performance. What on earth did it matter whether the detachment started this month or next? It was really incomprehensible why this flushed and ridiculous person in his dirty uniform, ragged beard, and dusty *aba* and head-dress, should take things to heart in this way. Nuri was commanding the troops at Fagieh, and it was for him to decide which operation was the most profitable. All that had to be done was to keep the line cut north of Maan, and this could be done just as well by sitting comfortably at Fagieh, and attacking Abu Jerdun each time the Turks reoccupied it, as by sending a detachment miles away up the line.

He settled himself down with his captured Goertz glasses to watch the show. We had a clear view of the line from Aneiza hill almost to Maan itself. Immediately below us, about two miles off, were the two white buildings which marked Abu Jerdun station. Six guns were to cover the attack from the west, and away on the other side of the line were two more—my two—which had been sent across in the night. The Turks had from two to three hundred men in the station, with only one gun, but they had dug deep trenches and would take some driving out.

The attack opened with an aeroplane bombardment of the station. At the same time the eight guns opened fire, and for half an hour the buildings were completely hidden behind a screen of dust and smoke. Unfortunately, the Turks were not in the station at all, but lying low in their trenches, and very little damage was done. The Arab infantry



advanced bravely across the open to the attack, but were held up at about six hundred yards. They were only about three hundred all told, and the Turkish fire was very accurate and deadly. Our two armoured cars were right up in the firing-line, where every tyre was shot away; but though they drew a great deal of Turkish fire, it was not enough. One dashing cavalry charge by the Bedouin would probably have turned the scale, but they only clustered in a hollow well under cover and did nothing.

Looking away towards Aneiza I suddenly saw a train like a small black caterpillar crawling along the line. I pointed it out to Zeid, and we watched it for some time.

"It cannot do any harm," he said. "Nuri ordered the detachment which crossed the line last night to send out a demolition party to blow up a few rails three miles away."

For more than two hours the attack went on. The train seemed to be getting alarmingly close. It struck me that perhaps Nuri could not see it, so we sent a horseman off to tell him that it was coming, and a little later we saw the armoured cars bump off on their rims to meet it. I thought rather bitterly of my plan of a simultaneous attack north of Aneiza, which would probably have delayed, if it had not altogether stopped the Turks from trying to reinforce. It turned out afterwards that by some mistake no rails had been blown up at all, and the train came steadily on to within half a mile of the station. The engine was in rear of the trucks, and when the armoured cars appeared, it uncoupled itself and backed away again towards Aneiza. Some of our guns shelled the trucks which were left

stranded on the line, but did not seem to hit them. The armoured cars took their place in the firing-line again, thinking that they had scared away the engine for good, but the driver was a stout fellow. Choosing a time when the cars were too busy to attend to him, he coolly drove back and shoved the trucks right into the station. This ended the battle. The Arabs were tired out by this time, and had lost rather heavily. The moral effect of this reinforcement was too much for them, and they abandoned the attack.

"I fear we shall not take Abu Jerdun to-day," said Zeid. "I am sorry."

"Yes, indeed," said I, "it is a great pity."

"Do you know why I am sorry?" he went on. "I should like to have taken that engine driver and given him a medal!"

After the fight was over, I rode back by car to Aba'l Lissan. I went to see Feisal, told him the result of the battle and said good-bye. I regretted very much that the state of my health would not permit of any more camel-riding, but I hoped that the detachment would eventually start and be a great success. I may add that the guns did actually start, either the next day or the day after, and that Sherif Násir, with the help of Peake and Hornby, successfully captured two stations north of Jurf, where he maintained himself for some time, and did a great deal of damage to the line. It was disappointing not to be with them, but when the news of their success reached me in the Akaba hospital, I was delighted to think that I had had some hand in getting them started. My wanderings had earned for me the nickname of "Makik," or Shuttle. This was first used in friendly derision by one of the Arab

officers, but the laugh was turned against him by my accepting the title gladly, and expressing the pious hope that I should succeed in weaving such a robe of honour for our noble Lord Feisal as would make him renowned amongst the princes of the world.

## CHAPTER VIII

### CAMELS (AZRAQ, 1918)

Q work for the Sherifian army. The Camel Transport Corps. Its independence. Two thousand camels. Preparations for the great raid. The Imperial Camel Corps. Changes of plan. Organising convoys. Sheikh Yusuf and the telegram. Spitting. The start. Pisani's barley. Concentration at Azraq.

WHILE I lay in the hospital tent at Akaba, I pondered over my adventures with the Beni Sakhr. Everything I had seen and heard confirmed my opinion of the Bedouin, and I was not at all keen to go on working with them. They were useless against the railway without artillery support, and could not be depended upon to co-operate in any attack on a fortified position. Politically, of course, Feisal would be helpless without them, but I doubted whether even Lawrence could get unsupported Bedouin to do any good on this northern section of the line, where the enemy was so much stronger ; and even if he could, they would never work to programme.

More and more clearly did I see that Arab co-operation with General Allenby could only be secured through the regular army. That they could and would fight to the death had been proved at Maan and Abu Jerdun. If they could only be made mobile, and organised to send out and maintain small detachments, in any direction, with two or even one of the indispensable guns, Feisal would have an instrument to his hand with which he could do whatever General Allenby wanted. The trouble

was that they were both too regular and not regular enough. The officers quoted the textbook quite correctly against us when we asked them to take a risk, but failed to realise that the risk was due in the first place to their own faulty administration. We must help them to improve this, so that if General Allenby wanted a diversion made at a given spot and on a given date, a detachment would be there punctually for the Bedouin to rally round. Lawrence was enough and more than enough to help Feisal with the Bedouin ; the place for me was with Joyce and the regular army. Having to go to Cairo to see a doctor, I took the opportunity of suggesting this to Dawnay, who quite agreed when he heard the inside history of the Beni Sakhr fiasco. So when I was fit again I came back to Akaba as Joyce's "Q." Maynard was at the same time relieved by Stirling, who became "G.," and we three set to work to do what we could to make the regular army mobile.

It will be remembered that Feisal had been lent a company of the Egyptian Camel Transport Corps to help him in getting up his supplies and ammunition from Akaba to Waheida. The time had come when Hinde, who commanded this company, and all his British and Egyptian non-commissioned officers and men could for some reason no longer be spared. General Allenby only agreed to leave the seven hundred camels with Feisal on condition that he ran them with Arabs, and one of my first jobs was to organise the brutes into what was called the Hejaz Transport Corps. This gave me a good deal of trouble. Feisal had no transport personnel, and was forced to send urgently for wild camel-men from Mecca to replace the Egyptians, whose

organisation allowed one man for every two camels. Officers and N.C.O.s had to come from the Arab Regular Army, though I had insisted on keeping Hinde's two lieutenants, Spence and Grey, for the first month at any rate. My only hope of keeping the company in being, and the camels fit, was to insist on the Arabs following the system worked out by Hinde for the Egyptians, and for this I must have British officers to help me.

Under Hinde's system, the whole company used to do the round trip from Akaba to Waheida and back once in every ten days. Four days were allowed for the actual journey each way, with a rest of two days at Akaba between trips. Roughly speaking, six hundred loads went up each time. Taking a load as 300 pounds—a very easy estimate—Waheida was getting 180,000 pounds, or eighty tons, every ten days. Eight tons a day is not much for a force of from three to four thousand men with a dozen guns, but Feisal could usually manage to hire Bedouin caravans at an exorbitant rate to help him out. The fear was that under Arab control the company would be split up into little pieces, and sent up and down at the caprice of anyone who had a wire to pull. The consequence would be that less and less attention would be paid to the care of the animals, and in a short time they would all be out of action.

Only those who have seen a corps of seven hundred camels will be able to realise what a task this reorganisation alone involved. It would be tiresome to describe the means by which it was done. The Arab officers of the new Hejaz Transport Corps were intensely anxious to preserve their independence, or *Istiqlal*, and so were the camels. This

abstraction caused more difficulty than any material obstacle. The following dialogue between myself and the Arab Commandant may be taken as typical :

*Myself.* Good morning, Ali Bey. Are the camels ready to go up to Aba'l Lissan ?

*Ali Bey.* Good morning, my brother. I fear not.

*Myself.* How is that, my friend ? They were to be ready at nine o'clock and it is now eleven.

*Ali Bey.* I have employed them in carrying some supplies which were required by Sheikh So-and-so.

*Myself.* But that is not what they are for, my brother. His Highness Sherif Feisal is anxiously awaiting them at Aba'l Lissan.

*Ali Bey.* I am the commander of the Transport Corps. I shall employ it at my discretion.

*Myself (rather shortly).* Of course, I know that you are the commander. But this particular convoy has to go to Aba'l Lissan to-day.

*Ali Bey (snorting).* I am an Arab. I am working for Arab *Istiqlal*. I take orders from no one.

*Myself.* I am not attempting to give you orders, my friend. I am only saying that the camels must go to Aba'l Lissan to-day, or the troops there will be without supplies. That is understood.

*Ali Bey (wildly).* I take no orders from you. I am *Mustaqqil* (independent).

*Myself.* Yes. Yes. I know. You are *Mustaqqil*. I am *Mustaqqil*. Sidi Feisal is *Mustaqqil*. The camels are *Mustaqqil*. But *Mustaqqil* or no *Mustaqqil* they will jolly well start in one hour from now for Aba'l Lissan.

I am afraid that my eagerness to get things done occasionally offended some of the more sensitive Arab officers. Three of them once protested to Nuri that they were not being treated with the respect due to independent Allies. But Nuri's

tact was equal to the occasion. "Why worry, my dears?" said he. "He talks to them just as he does to us!" By "them" he meant Joyce and the other British officers, whose thankless and little-recognised labours were so largely responsible for Feisal's great raid, and with whom I was always on the best of terms.

Not long after I got back to Akaba we heard that Lawrence had prevailed on General Allenby to spare no less than another two thousand camels to help Feisal. He had always had in mind that some time in the autumn an Arab force should set out from Waheida and ride across the desert on the east of the line right up to Deraa, where they would attack the Turkish communications simultaneously with General Allenby's main attack on the other side of the Jordan. His first idea was that he would mount a thousand Arab regulars on five hundred camels, two men riding on each animal, and send them swooping across the three hundred miles which separate Waheida from Deraa with their supplies and ammunition tied on with bits of string, and a roll of apricot paste, or *Qamr-ud-din*, as the Turks call their staple ration, snugly stowed in each of the thousand haversacks. How long he thought the ride would take was never quite clear. He probably calculated on about eighty miles a day, a distance which his Bedouin irregulars could easily manage. Say four days for the trip to Deraa, one day for demolitions, and three days to race back in if General Allenby's big push was unsuccessful.

Lawrence's main conception was perfectly sound, but he was badly out in his details. He never knew very much about the regular army, and did not in



the least understand how different it was from his own Bedouin. He had no sympathy with our transport problems, for he held all military organisations in profound contempt, and the letter "Q," so justly and deeply revered by every regular, had no place in the Lawrentian alphabet. We, on the other hand, knew only too well that the problem of moving an Arab regular force strong enough to do really useful work was not less but a hundred times more difficult than that of moving an equal number of other regular troops. To start with, the British officers were not in executive command, and could give no direct orders, even to a camel-herd. Everything had to be done either in the form of a request to the higher Arab authorities, or, more often, in the form of an intimation to subordinates that the higher authorities wished something done which, in the majority of cases, those authorities knew nothing whatever about. There was a continual risk of serious friction in a system of this kind, but what else could be done? The subordinate officers were in many cases incompetent and in all cases unaware of it, and if they were left to run their own show nothing whatever would be done.

It will be seen that the problem of forming a caravan of some two thousand camels in the charge of Arab camel-men, with the object of enabling a detachment of Arab regulars to strike a blow on a given day at a given point on the enemy line of communications, was in itself no easy one. But this was not all. The force would be useless without guns, and with the exception of the Talbot ten-pounders all the guns in the Arab Army were carried on mules. The proposed route led through only three oases, Jafar, Bair, and Azraq. Jafar was

sixty miles' march from Waheida, Bair was sixty miles from Jafar, Azraq was one hundred and twenty miles' from Bair, and sixty from Deraa, where we were to strike. Loaded camels and loaded mules could not be asked to go more than thirty miles in a day. The caravan must therefore be prepared for two successive stages of two days' march each, followed by a stage of four days' march and a final stage of two days', each stage being without a drop of water. The camel is fortunately enabled by nature to do a march of this kind, though he does not like it, but water for men and mules would have to be carried on the camels' backs. And it was not enough to carry two days' water, though this would be enough for three out of the four stages. The third stage needed four days' water, so that an extra supply of empty water-tins had to be filled at the end of the second stage and loaded on to such of the food camels as had by that time become light.

Then there was the problem of food for the men and forage for the animals. The so-called oases of Jafar, Bair, and Azraq are merely water-holes in the arid expanse of desert. They are uninhabited, and produce food for neither man nor beast. Every morsel of food and forage for the ten days' march to Deraa would either have to be carried with the force or dumped in advance at the three oases. Dumping forage by camel at a spot eight marches away is not so easy. The idea that a camel can go for indefinite periods without either food or water, supporting himself by a process known as living on his hump, is false, and he must eat, even when he is only providing himself with food for a future journey. Allowing him eight pounds

a day, he will eat 128 pounds in the sixteen days' trip, so that if his full load is 300 pounds he can only dump 172 pounds at the other end.

I was fully occupied during the next few days in organising the seventy-mile line of communication from Akaba to Aba'l Lissan, and working out a plan for the great raid. I took over my duties as head of the Q. section of Joyce's staff at the beginning of July, and by the 22nd had prepared a detailed scheme which was approved by Joyce and Feisal and sent to Akaba to be posted to General Allenby at G.H.Q. This scheme provided for the arrival at Azraq some time in October of a flying column composed as follows :

- 5 armoured cars with tenders.

- 50 Sherifian officers.

- 500 Sherifian regulars (including machine-gun companies and medical staff).

- 10 machine-guns.

- 6 guns.

- 100 artillerymen and engineers.

- 200 mules and

- 800 camels out of the 1,200 with which the column would leave Waheida.

On arrival at Azraq they would have :

- 35 days' rations.

- 750 rounds of small-arm ammunition per man for 500 men.

- 12 boxes of ammunition per gun for 10 machine-guns.

- 600 rounds per gun for 6 guns.

- 13,000 pounds of gun-cotton complete with primers and fuses.

- 90 small tents.

- 2 large hospital tents.

- 10 stretcher camels for wounded.

35 days' rations for 40 British ranks (armoured cars, etc.), and  
88 cases of petrol.

These supplies were to be replenished by regular convoys once every ten days, and it was contemplated that the column, which would have a ten days' radius of action from its desert base, would be able to cut the railway between Deraa and Damascus and keep it cut for an indefinite period.

I mopped my brow as soon as I had got this off my chest, and turned with renewed vigour to my struggles with Ali Bey. I was rather pleased with my scheme, which seemed quite watertight and likely to lead to great things. But I was to suffer one or two rude shocks. Actually while the scheme was being prepared and before it was sent off, a telegram came from "Hedgehog" announcing that there was to be a stunt. There were in fact to be two stunts. A detachment of the Imperial Camel Corps, a British unit of General Allenby's army, was to march across to Akaba from Beer-sheba and to attack the station of Mudawwara, sixty-five miles south of Maan. They were then to march to Jafar and Bair and make descents upon the line north of Maan. Joyce had been committed to putting out dumps of forage and rations for them at Rum, on the way to Mudawwara, and at Jafar and Bair. Had he not over two thousand camels at his disposal, and could not almost unlimited convoy work be done with these useful animals?

Joyce and I were in despair. He sent an urgent telegram accepting the Mudawwara stunt, but urging strongly that the other should be given up.

He pointed out that it would delay the great raid by four weeks, and even if successful it would not achieve anything like so valuable a result as that anticipated from the scheme which was actually in the post. A reply came that it was not intended that stunt number two should delay or interfere with the main autumn operation, which remained essentially the first consideration. It was thought that stunt number two, following closely upon stunt number one, would be of the utmost value. If the provision of camel-men was the difficulty, it was suggested that the personnel of Peake's Egyptian Camel Corps supplemented by Lawrence's braves would meet the case. Lawrence himself would be flown over in a day or two, if possible, to make everything right. Joyce and I discussed this telegram with some grinding of teeth, and decided that there was nothing for it but to use some of the priceless camels to put out a dump for stunt number one, and to await further comments when our scheme had been digested at G.H.Q.

Meanwhile Lawrence flew over and explained, what could not have been said in the telegram, that General Allenby was already preparing for his great advance, which was timed to take place at the beginning of October. All idea of prolonged operations by the Arab flying column was thus out of the question. What was wanted was a swift and sudden blow with the object of cutting the Turkish communications in the first week of October, just before Allenby's attack. This put a different complexion on the matter, though it did not explain why Joyce had been saddled with the I.C.C. without having been consulted. He did not agree with Lawrence that their descent upon Akaba

would be a good thing. They were not to be attached to the Arabs, and it was doubtful whether the sudden incursion of a British unit under British command would be welcomed. My point of view was purely arithmetical. Each camel load given to Buxton was a camel load taken from our own flying column, and we wanted all we could get.

Relations between Lawrence and ourselves became for the moment a trifle strained, and the sight of the little man reading the "Morte d'Arthur" in a corner of the mess-tent with an impish smile on his face was not consoling. But we had to play up, as Buxton was already on his way from Beersheba, and when his splendid army arrived at Akaba we forgot all about our grievances. They had a most successful action at Mudawwara on 8th August, taking the station and inflicting over 150 casualties. Stunt number two was, however, unfruitful, and they padded silently back to Beersheba a few days later, having no doubt given a useful object-lesson to the Arabs, but having also used up a large number of camel loads which were wanted for dumps for the flying column.

Hardly had they disappeared when we got another fearful shock. On the 19th August Joyce was told that General Allenby's move had been put forward by two or three weeks, and that if the great raid was to be of any use it must take place not later than the 16th September. It may be imagined what this would have meant even to a properly constituted Q. department, with a full staff. What it meant to us was really beyond description. We had already modified our original plan to some extent, and had given up all that part of the scheme which provided for a prolonged opera-

tion based on Azraq. But there was still a great deal to be done in the way of putting out dumps of forage and petrol merely to enable the column to reach Azraq at all. This last blow nearly made the whole plan impossible. In order to strike on the 16th September, two convoys of six hundred baggage camels each had to be started off from Akaba, one on the 26th and the other on the 28th August, with all the materials for the expedition. On arrival at Aba'l Lissan, seventy miles north of Akaba, some four hundred and fifty of these baggage camels had to be converted into riding-camels. Their pack-saddles had to be dumped and brand-new riding-saddles, promised from Egypt but not yet at Akaba, substituted for them. The remaining seven hundred and fifty of the twelve hundred were to remain as baggage camels in the charge of the great Hejaz Transport Corps, which was by now almost a military unit, Ali Bey having mercifully disappeared. These had to be loaded with carefully calculated loads of water for men, water for mules, forage, British rations, French rations, Arab rations, Egyptian rations, and Gurkha rations ; ammunition for rifles, machine-guns, and two different kinds of Q.F. gun ; explosives, bivouac tents, petrol for the armoured cars and aeroplanes, and hospital equipment. At no stage of the proceedings was it safe for me to be absent. It is almost true to say that either I or one of my British officers personally supervised every single load, so vital was it that nothing should go wrong.

From the 19th to the 22nd of August I was at Akaba, calculating loads, checking the masses of equipment which came in daily from Cairo, organising the camel-men, and sending desperate telegrams for things which had been forgotten. It

is not cool at Akaba in August, and we used to bathe two or three times a day in the blue waters of the gulf. The place was one seething, snarling, sweating mass of camels and Arabs, each as difficult as the other to control, but somehow or other the loads were all arranged and on the 23rd I could rush up again to Aba'l Lissan to make final arrangements for the redistribution. Here the problem was quite different. There were seven different authorities whose demands for transport had to be satisfied—the Sherifian army, the attached British staff, the airmen, the armoured cars, Pisani's French gunners, the medical authorities, and the combined demolition party of Gurkhas and Egyptian Camel Corps. There is a limit even to what seven hundred and fifty camels can carry, especially if a twenty days' march is in prospect, and conflicting claims had to be very carefully adjusted.

When all was more or less arranged, down I rushed again in my trusty Ford to superintend the actual starting of Convoy No. 1 on the 26th. Everything was in full swing, when there was a sudden loud explosion and cries of "*Taiyyara! Taiyyara!*" Looking up I saw two German aeroplanes at an immense height, and as I looked, down came another bomb. In a moment all was confusion, and much precious time was wasted in rounding up the terrified camel-men and disentangling the camel-ropes which they had let fall. Luckily no great harm was done, and the convoy straggled out of Akaba on its first stage of five or six miles without mishap. Only one thing was incomplete. The Bedouin camel-men, when they heard that they were to go miles out into the desert, insisted upon being given rifles and ammunition.



For some reason these were not at the moment available, and I had to satisfy them with a solemn promise that they should not leave Aba'l Lissan without them. Now they were due to leave Aba'l Lissan with the reconstructed Convoy No. 1 on the 30th, which was the day following that on which they were due to arrive there. It was clear then that the rifles, which formed ten camel loads, must be sent up on the following day if my promise was to be kept, and I must get the ten camels by hook or crook out of the Sherifian authorities, as every one of my own was earmarked for other work.

Early next morning I visited Sheikh Yusuf, Feisal's representative at Akaba, and explained matters to him. Sheikh Yusuf greeted me hospitably in his stifling audience room. He professed to see no difficulty. The ten camels would be sent up at once with the rifles and ammunition. I went back to breakfast in the Mess, but once bitten is twice shy, and an hour later I paid another visit to the Sheikh. The camels had not gone. Sheikh Yusuf was very sorry. As a matter of fact he had found it impossible to hire any camels. It was God's will. I saw the Sheikh watching me closely, and talked bravely about other matters. Very soon I rose to go—rather sooner than politeness demanded. "I take leave," I said politely. "I have somewhat to do." The Sheikh was inquisitive. "Doubtless some urgent matter?" he ventured. "Nay, nay," said I, "a mere matter of a telegram." "A telegram? To whom?" "Nay, it is of no moment, my brother." "But to whom, I beseech you?" "To Allenby." "To Allenby? Allah! what sayest thou to Allenby?" enquired the Sheikh. "'Tis naught, O Sheikh. I do but ask him to delay the

movement of 150,000 men for one day." "To delay the movement——? 150,000 men——? one day——? What is this, my dear?" "For Allenby it is easy," I replied with some bitterness. "His armies move as one man. His staff is highly trained. Walter Campbell will think nothing of it. It is, however, inevitable. His Highness Sidi Feisal has promised to make an attack upon a certain day, and if the convoy is delayed by one day the attack will be delayed by one day. If the camel-men have no rifles the convoy will be delayed, and if you cannot find me ten camels in one hour from now the camel-men will have no rifles. So Allenby must also wait one day," and I turned to go.

Before I had gone two steps I was clutched by the arm. The Sheikh was on his feet. "But that will be shame," he cried—"shame on our Lord Feisal and the Arab nation. Thou shalt have them forthwith, by my beard I swear it." And in less than the hour he produced them, but I was not yet out of the wood. When I reached the tumbled maze of ropes and dung and sand which was by courtesy the Sherifian camel-lines, I found that not a camel-man would venture to take up so precious a freight without a guard. A small knot of sweaty Allies collected in the blazing sun at the edge of the fringe of tattered palm trees on the beach, and declined with varying degrees of emphasis to stir a finger. In vain I employed argument, cajolery, and even threats. "We know thee not!" shouted a great black Meccan, thrusting himself forward as spokesman. "We take orders only from our Lord, the Sherif." For the first and I think the last time, I lost control. Having told them all at the top of my voice what I

thought of them in the most abusive Arabic I knew, I finished up by spitting almost in the Meccan's face. Funnily enough, this did the trick. The others roared with laughter, hustled the discomfited black man away, and loaded up the camels without more ado.

Next day, the 28th, Convoy No. 2 left Akaba according to plan, and I jumped for the last time into the little Ford. For the last time I shoved it up the Negab and looked out from the summit over wind-swept Rum and the shimmering depths of the Wady Araba. Then I turned with a sigh of relief and drove on to Aba'l Lissan to superintend the next stage. As I crested the Negab I saw the tail of Convoy No. 1 turning into its camp among the limestone boulders, and in another minute I was back among my friends of three days ago. This was my first experience of an uncanny effect of moving backwards in time which was to become very familiar during the next fortnight, as I passed, and met, and repassed and met again the two long lines of weary beasts straggling across the featureless desert.

At Aba'l Lissan I found a certain liveliness, due to a proclamation in King Hussein's newspaper which had caused offence to Ja'far and his officers. The night before they had all resigned, but there was never any real fear that they would persist in this, and my arrangements were not interfered with. Both convoys had to be entirely reconstituted into two marching columns before they left Aba'l Lissan. Four hundred and twenty out of the twelve hundred camels had to be fitted out as riding-camels with brand-new saddles, bridles, and head-ropes, brought up for them as loads from Akaba. Then the

Sherifian soldiers, honest cultivators for the most part from the lands which fringe the Arabian deserts, had to be introduced to their strange mounts. The air was full of gobblings and growlings, and I was kept very busy. I had to go very carefully into the number of camels to be allotted to each unit, as we were working with no margin of safety, and I only yielded to Pisani's very large demand under great pressure. I was anxious about the camels' grain, as I could give each beast only three days' rations in a sand-bag, and had to rely on Feisal for fresh supplies at Bair and Azraq. At Jafar there was a remnant of the dump which I had put out for Buxton, whose splendidly regular army passed through Aba'l Lissan while we were in our worst throes, and filled us with envy and admiration.

The first column was escorted by a combined demolition party of Gurkhas and Egyptian Camel Corps, under Peake, and also had with it an advance party of Pisani's gunners under a sous-officier. It started punctually on the 30th August, and had hardly disappeared when Convoy No. 2 arrived from Akaba. Getting the second column started was more difficult, as the Arab detachment was only just formed, and the officers were still a little peevish about King Hussein's proclamation; but it moved out of the camp on the 2nd September, only one day late, eight hundred camels and seven hundred men strong.

Feisal drove out in his new Vauxhall car to review them as they picked their way daintily past him by two and by two among the limestone boulders which studded the broad grass-track over the downs. They had picked up the formation

and general style of the Imperial Camel Corps, and I could not help contrasting their business-like ranks with the untidy horde of raggie-taggle gipsies which would have been straggling past if it had not been for our labours. As each section saluted Feisal I even felt an absurd lump in my bearded throat at the greatness of the sight. Then I climbed into a Rolls tender and dashed off on my last series of shuttlings.

The two great caravans of six and eight hundred laden camels were now pacing steadily northwards like the children of Israel on their three-hundred-mile march across the gravel desert. They were ninety miles apart and would neither see nor hear anything of each other until they met again at the reedy pools and dry mud-flats which lie about the ruined castle of Azraq. Utter silence encompassed them. Away on their left flank, far out of sight and sound, the little Turkish trains crawled to and fro on their toy railway-line, busy and unsuspecting, while they themselves saw no living thing. As my stout car ate up in three short hours the three days' weary march which lay between them, I wondered whether I should find at Bair and Azraq the grain which Feisal and Lawrence had promised should be there, and what would happen if they failed me. But I did not rely too much upon their promises, for at the back of my mind was a serene confidence that God would surely not allow the two great hosts to perish by the way.

Peake and his column had left Jafar when I got there, but my barley dump was in good order, and Auda assured me that there had been no difficulty. Seeing that all was well, I went straight on to Bair, which I reached just as it was getting dark. Here

there was no sign of life, and not a grain of barley. I could not be sure of meeting Peake, as the cars did not follow the same track as the camels, so I left a message for him with one of Auda's men whom I had luckily brought with me, and dashed back to Jafar to see Auda himself. He told me that the barley for Bair had just been dumped at Jafar by mistake, but promised to send it on at once by Bedouin caravan. This could not of course catch up Peake's column in time, but it might save him from going for more than one day without rations. After my experience with Sheikh Yusuf at Akaba I was not going to stir from Jafar until I saw a caravan actually starting, and this did not happen until well after midday on the 4th September. By that time Peake was riding into Bair, and I had only just time to catch him up in the car and warn him before nightfall. As I roared away from the little knot of Bedouin hangers-on round Auda's tent, I saw in the distance the advance-guard of the second column advancing inexorably on its appointed way. But I could not stop to greet Nuri or tell him what was happening : I must rush back to Bair and see what could be done to help Peake.

As I climbed stiffly out of the car by the Bair water-hole, Peake came forward to meet me. "Everyone is giving trouble," he said, "except my own men. The Gurkhas have got some grouse against their jemadar which I can't understand, the Algerians are fighting each other, and the Sherifian camel-men say that if they get no barley the camels will die and they themselves will come to an awful end." But things were not so bad as they sounded. The Gurkhas were soon laughed into a good temper, and the French sous-officier of the Algerian

detachment managed to restore order as soon as he got a little more support. The barley was the real difficulty. Suddenly my eye fell on some bulging sacks among the Algerian loads. "What is that?" I asked. "Barley for our mules," said the sous-officier. "How many loads?" "Thirty loads." Thirty loads—why, that was twenty loads too many! Six thousand pounds of barley. Ten pounds a camel for the whole convoy. Blessings on Pisani and his acquisitiveness! I impounded twenty loads forthwith, in spite of the terrified protests of the sous-officier, and the day was saved.

After all this, I was not surprised to find next evening on arriving at Azraq, a hundred and twenty miles farther on, that there was no sign of life there either and not a grain of barley, though I had been promised five hundred loads. I had been joined at Bair by an advance-party of R.A.F. and armoured-car personnel in Crossley and Rolls tenders, and I should have liked to stay with them at this lodge in the wilderness, sending my own Rolls tender back with a message for Joyce. But I was nervous by now of sending messages, and decided to go with it. I left the advance-party putting up the hangar and started on my last journey of two hundred and forty miles to Aba'l Lissan. On the way I met a Druze caravan returning to the Jebel and found that it was on its way to fetch the promised barley for Azraq. Resisting with some difficulty the temptation to go officiously with them and see that they really did it, I continued my journey, and just outside Bair came upon Peake's column safely started on its last lap with the barley which had been brought on by the Howeytat caravan from Jafar.

I decided to wait at Bair until Nuri and the detachment arrived, so that I might be sure that all was well with them too. They arrived well up to time, and none the worse for their five days' march, though camels and riders were both a little chafed by unfamiliar contact. I was talking to a group of Arab officers and chaffing them about the completeness of their preparations, when a small bearded figure in neat French khaki, with braided cap and three rows of medal ribbons, burst suddenly into the circle. It was Pisani, almost speechless with fury, and waving a small piece of paper in his hand. "My sous-officier reports," he said in a trembling voice, "that twenty loads of barley were taken from my advance-detachment at this place." "Yes," said I. "By whose orders?" "By mine," said I. "By your orders? By your orders?" And the little man turned and took five short paces in the hope of mastering his emotion. Turning round and pacing back, he confronted me again. "You took my barley?" he cried, and cast his braided cap upon the ground. I could only nod. "You took my barley? and you call yourself a *Commandant*?" and he ground the cap into the dust with his heel. Walking away once more, he came back for the last time. He was actually tearing hairs from the small, wiry tuft on his chin, a thing I have never seen done before or since. "I shall report you to G.H.Q.," he said excitedly. "*Commandant* or no, you have no right to take my barley. I am responsible for my mules and for my detachment. You have no right to interfere." And he picked up his cap and walked away.

Poor Pisani had a perfect right to protest, but it was unfortunate that he had chosen to make a scene



in front of the Arabs. Joyce and his staff had always been most careful to discourage any tendency to decry and grumble at the French detachment. It had done wonderful work, and was worth two of any of the Arab batteries, but it was the fashion in Arab circles to minimise the help it gave, for political reasons. Pisani's position was thus a difficult one, and it was doubly unfortunate that it should happen to be he who had got excited. I followed him at once and did my best to pacify him, but it was quite useless, and I could only hope that we should be able to make it up later on. The rest of Nuri's column was in splendid order, and when I reached Aba'l Lissan for the last time on the 7th September, Joyce was delighted to hear that all was going so well. I found that Lawrence and Winterton had left for Azraq in another Rolls tender, taking with them Sherif Násir, who was to represent Feisal with the flying column. Four days later, Joyce and Stirling and I followed them, and by the 13th September the whole force was collected at Azraq.

## CHAPTER IX

### DEMOLITIONS (DERAA, 1918)

Disappointing beginnings. Lawrence to the rescue. Nuri as Said. The Bedouin let us down. Tel Arar. Peake's demolition. Junor crashes. Riding to Mezerib. The station captured. Tulips. Tel ash Shehab. Riding past Rimtha. Demolition at Nisib. Deraa encircled. Clearing an aerodrome. General Allenby's advance. Air activities.

PARTLY to stop the Turks at Amman reinforcing Deraa, and partly in the hope of mystifying them and taking their attention off the place where the line was to be cut in earnest, we decided to start work on the 14th or 15th by breaking the line south of Deraa. With some difficulty we induced the Arabs to leave this to Peake's combined demolition party of Egyptians and Gurkhas, as we did not want to risk another fiasco like Abu Jerdun, where the Sherifian demolition party reported a break which had not in fact been made. Peake was given two armoured cars to escort him, as no guns could be spared, and marched off on the afternoon of the 13th. The main body started at dawn next day, and marched steadily northwards for about twenty miles, halting for the night in a grassy valley where the camels found good grazing. Now that the British officers were collected, there was not room for all to ride in the tenders which had brought them by relays to Azraq. Foreseeing this, I had been careful to pick out the best of Allenby's two thousand camels for my own use, and had sent my servant with it. I also borrowed a mule from one of the Sherifian pack batteries, so that I could move

easily over any ground. In the rough lava-strewn country which lies on the east of the railway between Azraq and Deraa I rode the mule myself and put my kit and servant on the camel, but when the going was good we changed places.

We marched again at dawn through a nightmare country of black lava where the camels slipped and grunted and the Rolls tenders went through strains which even their designers had not foreseen. I rode that day with Pisani, who had quite recovered from his annoyance about the barley and beguiled the way with stories of his campaigns in Africa. Towards midday Peake rejoined the force, with a disappointing tale. Unfortunately no one had realised that at this great distance from Aba'l Lissan, where not even a Sherifian force had yet been seen, the little force of Gurkhas and Egyptians, escorted by armoured cars and preceded by Peake's fair beard and Scott-Higgins's really terrifying black whiskers, would need some explaining. As they neared the line, which they reached at a point some miles south of their objective, they ran into a large encampment of local Bedouin, who were paid by the Turks to protect the line. This would not have mattered if Lawrence or Feisal or even Sherif Násir had been with them, since Bedouin allegiance was easily transferred as circumstances might dictate. But Peake had no Political officer with him, and it was in vain that he described the imposing array moving slowly towards Deraa. He was not believed, and all he could do was to extract a promise of secrecy before he rode away. When Lawrence joined us that night, having ridden independently with his body-guard from Azraq, and heard what had happened, he was very angry. It

did not matter so much that the Arabs were inclined to blame us for not letting them do the thing themselves, or that he had omitted to send anyone with Peake ; what mattered was that the thing had not been done. The force was now encamped at Umm Taiyeh, some fifteen miles south-east of Deraa, and to-morrow was the first of the three days set by General Allenby for a diversion near Deraa. Two days later his own great advance would begin, so that there was no time to lose. Somewhere, somehow, Deraa must be cut off from the south to-morrow if it was to be successfully cut off from the north and west on the following day. The slow-moving main body of the Arab force had still twenty miles to go to reach the point on the Damascus line which was its first objective. It must be at full strength for this, and could not afford to leave a detachment behind for other work. Not even a body-guard could now move fast enough to cut the southern line and catch up the main body astride the northern line at dawn next day.

Lawrence's quick mind seized these points at once, and by the time the British and Arab officers met next morning he had his plan ready. He must do it himself. Let him have a tender and a machine-gun and he would run down to the line and do in a bridge. There was quite a good one at kilometre so-and-so, with a covered approach down the wadi which the car ought to manage. There was only a small post on the bridge, and with luck he ought to be able to do the job before the Turks realised what was happening. It would be rather amusing. To one at least of his hearers it did not sound at all amusing, it sounded quite mad. But this was again the Lawrence whose madness had taken Akaba, and

his madness on this occasion cut the Deraa-Amman line. Escorted by two armoured cars, and accompanied by Joyce and Winterton, he drove off that afternoon in the open tender, crammed to the gunwale with gun-cotton and detonators. While the machine-guns of the escort scattered the small Turkish post, the tender was driven right down to the bridge, where Lawrence laid and fired his charge. Then the small gay figure bumped airily away, perched high on the deadly boxes which any chance shot might blow into a thousand pieces.

Meanwhile the main column moved steadily northwards, guarded on its left flank by a screen of mounted Bedouin, who could be relied upon to come flying back and give timely warning of any Turkish move. As we neared Deraa, which was in full sight on the left front, I tried to forget that we were absolutely in the air, with no line of communications and no possible way of getting back. Comforting myself with the thought that Jeb Stuart's supply officer must often have felt as I did, I dug my heels into my mule and cantered on to join Nuri at the head of the column. Nuri was good company at all times, but he was at his best at a time like this. His great joke was to offer us what he and his brother officers of the Arab army called "calories." These were draughts of a yellow liquid which, to the infidel, smelt and tasted like whisky, but which was by courtesy referred to only as a food-value. As we rode along Nuri suddenly pointed to the clouds which hung low over distant Deraa. Tiny specks could be seen wheeling and circling above the town, while an occasional thud and pillar of white smoke rising from the ground showed that it was being heavily bombed. It was strange to

think that these machines had left Ramleh only an hour or so earlier and that their occupants would be back in Palestine before another two hours had passed. Punctuality at the rendezvous was for them a matter of minutes ; for us it had been a matter of exactly three weeks.

Just before nightfall we crossed the embankment on which before the War had run the light railway from Deraa to Bosrah eski Sham, along which Parfit and I had travelled four years ago. We bivouacked in the open, four or five miles from our objective, and advanced at dawn against the long, straight stretch of line which lay to the east of Tel Arar. The hill itself was a rocky outcrop only three miles north of Deraa and a few hundred yards west of the line. If we could take and hold it we should have a perfect covering position, behind which Peake and his merry men could work havoc undisturbed ; but the line must be crossed first, and this meant clearing out a Turkish post of about twenty men who were entrenched on the other side. The Bedouin horse asked to be allowed to do this, and were sent off by Sherif Násir with orders to do it quickly and report to Nuri.

I was with Nuri when the report came in, and suggested that we should run down in a Ford van and be the first regulars to stand on the main Turkish line of communications a hundred miles behind the Turkish front. Nuri jumped at the idea, and we rattled over the stony plough well ahead of the infantry, who were advancing to cross the line and take up a position on Tel Arar. Running the car to the foot of the embankment, we clambered up and struck attitudes in true Arab style on the middle of the permanent way. Three

or four Bedouin horsemen cantered on with us to see if there were any pickings left in the captured post, and rode gaily over the line towards the barbed wire, while Nuri and I drank a festal caloric. Suddenly there were loud exclamations, and the brave cavalry came flying back on top of us. Behind them a stout Turkish officer or N.C.O. sallied boldly forth in a long white nightshirt at the head of his men, brandishing what looked like a sword. At the same time a little crackle of musketry came from the sand-bags, which were only eighty yards away. It would be hard to say which of the two regulars looked more foolish. "Come on," said Nuri, drawing his revolver. "I'm damned if I do," said I, not having one, and pulled him down behind the embankment, where we hopped into the waiting Ford and rattled back again. It turned out that the Bedouin horse had never attacked the post at all, and precious time was lost while one of the French guns was brought up and the post silenced. Owing to this it was not till nearly ten o'clock that Tel Arar was occupied and the demolition begun.

Lawrence and Joyce had by this time got back from their adventure south of Deraa, and the British and Arab staff collected on the top of the hill to see what was happening. Deraa was just waking up to the fact that something was going on. The cutting of all the wires from Damascus and the sound of Pisani's guns showed that this was more than an Arab raid, though what it actually was no one in Deraa could understand. When the town was entered by British and Arab troops eleven days later, copies of Turkish reports and orders were found which showed how mystified the enemy had been. One of these reports said that Sherif Feisal was advanc-

ing on Deraa with a force of eighteen thousand men, while another contradicted this and said that there was no cause for alarm, as Feisal was three hundred miles away. But whether it was Feisal or someone else, there could be no harm in an air reconnaissance, and as the recent bombardment had not done any real damage, owing to the clouds, it was not long before a machine got up and sailed over Tel Arar. Every man in the force had a shot at it, and the French guns were up-ended in the hope of a hit, but it got back safely and gave the news that thousands of men and camels were swarming over the line. The result was that all the planes in Deraa—and there were eight of them—came out with bombs and machine-guns. Excitement now became practically continuous, as the aerodrome was not more than three or four miles away and ammunition could be replenished in a few minutes. The sight of the enemy machines reminded me that the Hejaz flight from Azraq was due to send its two machines over, and that they might turn up at any moment. As a matter of fact, one of the two had been disabled, but I did not know this, and as soon as I had got my camel safely barracked I set about clearing a landing-space on the best bit of ground I could find. This was a narrow strip of plough between the hill and the railway, plentifully strewn with large boulders, any one of which would wreck an under-carriage. My working-party was only about thirty strong and we would have our work cut out to clear enough space for a machine to land in.

While we did our best to roll away the boulders, Peake and his demolition party were working steadily up the line. The rest of the force had dis-



appeared as if by magic, Sherifians and Bedouin alike seeming to know by instinct what to do when attacked from the air. Neither had been trained or warned in any way, but they just scattered, and then sat stolidly by their barracked camels, having obviously made up their minds that running away would do no good. I tried to convince myself that they were right, but could not help wondering all the time whether a short run would not be helpful. Each time I came back for a fresh boulder I looked furtively up to see whether the latest plane was coming quite squarely at me or not. If it was, I almost unconsciously moved aside in the hope of catching sight of the end of one wing and proving to myself that I was not in the direct line.

Whether as a result of these and similar movements, or for some other reason, I was untouched by bomb or bullet, as were all but two of the Arab force and one of the camels, though the bombardment lasted for over an hour. It ended as suddenly as it had begun. The remaining machine of the Hejaz flight, a B.E. 12, piloted by Junor, came unconcernedly over at the appointed time. Finding the air unexpectedly crowded, he made off, and the enemy planes luckily followed him. Peake had by this time got almost out of sight up the line, and it seemed a good opportunity for a fresh move. Nuri with half the force slipped away over the downs towards Mezerib to cut the Deraa-Palestine railway, leaving the rest of the detachment on Tel Arar, in case the Deraa garrison plucked up courage and came out after all. No one told me this, but I gathered that something was up when my working-party suddenly disappeared in the infuriating way to which I had not yet grown accustomed. No.

Arab officer ever thought of telling the British adviser concerned when he marched away his troops. They would quite cheerfully have left a solitary British officer marooned on a mud-flat in the heart of the desert, not meaning any harm but simply because they did not feel called upon to announce that they were going away. We were quite alive to this peculiarity, and never allowed ourselves to be in any way dependent upon Sherifian rations or transport, since, if we had, we should have been stranded again and again. We just accepted the fact that we had to keep ourselves informed, but this did not make the casual way in which they continually abandoned us any the less galling.

On this occasion I managed to get a few men out of Pisani to finish up my clearing, and had almost got it done, with the help of one or two British officers, when Junor came back. Three enemy planes were on his tail, and he dropped a message to say that he must land as he had no more petrol. All hands now rushed to the improvised aerodrome, though it was too late to do much more. It was rather horrible to watch the young pilot in his old machine dodging and turning to escape his three grim enemies. As he was driven lower and lower I realised with a start that he was actually fighting for his life and that we were powerless to help him. We could only put out the landing signal in the best possible place and leave the rest to fate. Just at this moment the wind veered, and the narrow strip of stony ground which we had cleared, to give as long a run up-wind as possible, no longer lay in the right direction for landing. Junor landed well in the fairway, and for a moment it seemed as if all were

well. Then a puff of the fickle wind got under his machine and turned it into the stones, where it capsized. He dropped out unhurt ; but the machine was wrecked, and the gallant Hejaz flight ceased from that moment to exist. All the British officers ran to the wreck and helped him to carry off his machine-gun and ammunition, while his three pursuers roared down one after the other to two or three hundred feet and spat impotently at the little group. I whistled up one of the Fords, and we all bundled off in it just as a bomb fell where we had been standing. Junor at once mounted his machine-gun in the Ford and dashed off with Kirkbride towards Deraa in the hope of winging one of his tormentors when they next came out, and I went off to find my camel, having got Joyce's leave to join the Mezerib party, of which I had only just heard.

The camel took some finding, as I had almost buried it between two huge boulders on the east of the line and could not remember where it was. When I at last unearthed it I found myself strangely alone. Far away to the north an occasional puff of smoke showed where Peake was pursuing his work of destruction. In the other direction Deraa lay twinkling in the mirage but gave no sign of life. On Tel Arar a few figures showed up against the rocky outcrop where Joyce and Stirling kept watch with what remained of the detachment. Everything and everyone else had vanished. I mounted my beast and forced it over the embankment at the spot where Nuri and I had been surprised earlier in the day. Mezerib lay some five miles along the western railway, which dived a little farther on into the Yarmuk gorge. I had never been there, but I knew its

general direction and made sure of finding Nuri somehow. I had no idea how far ahead he and his detachment were, but they would certainly have to halt and water their animals, and I knew from the map that there was a large pool at Mezerib. As I rode over the stubbly downs which stretched away westward from Tel Arar, I wondered what I should do if I ran into an enemy patrol. I had a Webley in my saddle-bag and pulled it out to see that it was loaded, though I had not much confidence in my ability to use it from camel-back. Every few moments I looked up nervously to see whether one of the Deraa planes was following me, but they too had vanished, and I felt very lonely. Suddenly I saw a riderless camel standing pitifully on three legs, the fourth a spongy stump from which blood poured slowly. Its saddle and bridle had been carried away, but it did not look like one of the two thousand, and I supposed it to be one of Lawrence's. It looked quite happy, but to save it from a lingering death I shot it through the head with my Webley. A red spot sprang out on its cheek-bone, showing that I had not missed, but the patient beast merely looked round at me and went on chewing. At a second shot it shuddered and fell suddenly as a tree falls.

There were two railway stations at Mezerib, one of which was the junction between the Deraa-Palestine line and a dismantled French line from Damascus which ran parallel to and only a few miles away from the Hejaz railway. The other station was on this French line, about half a mile from the junction, and here I found Nuri and his detachment on the point of attacking the junction. It was a great comfort to be with friends once more, and the

fact that Lawrence and I were the only two British officers with the force, and that we were now actually inside the Turkish lines, did not worry me. Joyce and Stirling would hang on at Tel Arar to keep a crossing open for us to get back by, and so long as we suffered no reverse there was no fear of the local peasants turning against us.

Mezerib junction was held by a small Turkish force which was not going to give in without showing fight. It had not yet been reinforced from Deraa or from the Yarmuk direction, but the Palestine line and telegraph were intact, and at any moment a train full of troops with guns might come along and make things awkward. Nuri brought up his guns and sent his regulars at the station, and in half an hour it was taken. An orgy of looting followed, in which Arab regular and irregular alike fell upon a supply train which stood in a siding, and devoted themselves to filling their pockets and bellies. We two British officers were left to do what we could to snatch some permanent advantage from our rather precarious position. The first thing was to destroy the telegraph, so we climbed on to the station roof and reaching out for the thick wires cut them one by one. As the last wire parted we felt that we had completed the mystification of the Turkish G.H.Q. in Palestine. Wild stories of Feisal and his eighteen thousand men had no doubt been flashing along those very wires since the morning, and might even be passing at the moment.

It was odd to stand looking out over the peaceful landscape, in which there was no movement of man or beast, and to think of the consternation which the closing of those nippers must have caused in distant Nablus, but there was no time to waste. The

next job was to damage the railway-line and points, and Lawrence took the points while I moved a few hundred yards up the line towards Deraa, with two of the body-guard, to plant what we called tulips, small charges of gun-cotton, under the metal sleepers. I had planted half a dozen when something made me look along the line towards Deraa and my heart stood still, for a train was crawling slowly out of the town towards Mezerib. My first thought was to warn Lawrence, who was now almost alone in the station, Nuri having collected and marched off his detachment out of reach of the line. Rushing back at top speed, I shouted breathlessly that a train was coming. "A plane?" said Lawrence. "Oh, yes—that will do no harm!" "Not a plane, you damned fool," I roared, "a train." Lawrence did not turn a hair. "I suppose we'd better light our charges, then," he said. "I will do yours, if you like." But I was already running back, fumbling for my fusees. A fuse will not light from the flame of a match; it needs a glowing end to set it off, and I felt feverishly in one pocket after another as I pounded along the metals, but could not find the precious box. I was pouring with sweat and thoroughly uncomfortable by the time I got back to my two helpers. Neither of them had fusees, but one had matches, with which I lit a cigarette. Then began a hunt for the projecting ends of the buried fuses, which hid themselves obstinately under the metal sleepers. As each tulip was somewhere in the middle of a ten-metre rail, I had to cover another fifty or sixty yards before I reached the farthest fuse. Meanwhile the train was slowly crawling on, and there was not much time to spare. One last dab with the glowing cigarette, and I rushed to my

camel, which was placidly chewing the cud a few yards from the line. Vaulting into the saddle, I appealed to it with hoarse cries and severe blows. It rose at once to its feet but was hardly up before it stumbled and nearly fell, and I realised to my horror that I had forgotten to unhobble it. As the train was now quite close, and it was also about time for some of the tulips to go off, I could only throw myself off over its neck and run for my life. One of the body-guard cantered by, leading a spare camel which had been grazing and which he had been sent to round up. I shouted to him hoarsely to give me a lift, but the fellow called back that the camel belonged to Urans and could not be spared. Cursing in my beard, I ran on towards the French station, expecting at any moment to be drawn and quartered. It never struck me that the most the Turks could do would be to fire a few rounds in my direction. They did not, in fact, do anything at all, for just then my tulips sprouted, and so did Lawrence's, and the train thought it wise to shunt back into Deraa.

I went back and caught my three-legged camel, and Lawrence and I touched off the rest of our fuses. Then we rode on to join Nuri's column, which had halted about a mile west of the two Mezeribs, where there was good water and grazing. Here they had been joined by Kirkbride, who had followed my example and ridden across alone rather than be left behind. It was now evening, and everyone was tired and hungry. No definite plan had been made when the detachment left Tel Arar, but Lawrence had always hoped for a second opportunity of blowing up the great railway-bridge at Tel ash Shehab, five miles west of Mezerib. The

question was how to set about it. The approach to the bridge was covered by the village of Shehab, which was strongly placed on an outcrop of rock and could not easily be taken. On the bridge itself was a Turkish guard, which had been strengthened since Lawrence's unsuccessful attempt a year ago. Pisani's guns would be useless at night, and the tiny force of Sherifian regulars, gallant though they were, had not enough discipline or training for a night attack. Nuri was of course quite ready to try it; Lawrence was doubtful; and I was quite definitely against it. While we sat discussing what to do, the young sheikh of Shehab village appeared. He told us that the Armenian commander of the bridge guard was prepared to betray his post, and offered to fetch him, so that we could work out some plan together. At this stage of the proceedings I fell asleep, and when I woke up, at about ten o'clock, I found that the column was on the move.

It appeared that the Armenian had produced a wonderful plan. He was quite ready to turn traitor himself, but was not at all sure about his non-commissioned subordinates. In order to get them out of the way, half a dozen strong men from the Sherifian detachment were to be hidden in his house and the subordinates were to be sent for one by one. As each came in he was to be knocked on the head, after which the bridge was to be occupied and blown up. For some reason which was not quite clear, the whole Sherifian detachment was to join in, guns and camels and all, and it was the noise of saddling-up which had woken me. I did not think much of the scheme when I heard it, as it seemed to me an unsound attempt to combine regular with irregular work. I was still rather hide-bound, and it shocked



me to have melodrama brought in to reinforce military operations, but I said nothing, as the column was actually starting. Finding my way to its head, I joined Nuri and Lawrence, who were waiting dismounted a few hundred yards from the village for a guide to come out and conduct the six desperadoes to the Armenian's lodging. I did not actually see the chosen six, and never knew if they were to be regulars or irregulars ; but as it turned out they were not wanted, for while we sat waiting there we heard an engine puffing heavily up the steep gradient on our left. It came to a stand-still just below us, and sounds of booted feet and hoarse words of command came up to us through the night mist. We sat perfectly still, and in a few minutes the young sheikh came back to say that Turkish and German reinforcements had just arrived, the Armenian was no longer in command, and the melodrama could not take place. I heard this with some relief, as I had been getting very nervous, and did my best to discourage a whispered proposal from Nuri to attack the Germans with the bayonet. I had no stomach for this, as I was quite certain that the Arabs were not up to it, and thought it a pity for us to risk throwing everything away when we had been so successful.

In the end we crawled back to Mezerib, where we were joined at dawn on the 17th September by the rest of the column, except for the armoured cars and Peake's demolition party, who were to go straight back to Umm Taiyeh. The first thing to be done was to complete the demolitions at Mezerib station, while the force marched across, out of sight of Deraa, to recross the Hejaz railway-line at Nasib. Lawrence and I, with some of the French detach-

ment, did as much damage as we could, and caught up the column just as it was filing past Rimtha village. The villagers turned out in force, rifle in hand, and stood watching us as we crawled by. Through a gap in the hills on our left we caught a glimpse of Deraa itself, only five miles away, where were some fifteen hundred Turks. Behind us were the Germans, and ahead of us, at the broken bridge, there might well be reinforcements from Amman. I have never known camels march so slowly, or my own heart beat so fast, as on that sixteen-mile ride from Mezerib to Nasib. I expected at any moment to be swooped upon by the Deraa aeroplanes or attacked by one of the four enemies who surrounded us, for the Rimtha villagers seemed to me as hostile as any Turk or German. The column was trailing along in what appeared to me to be no sort of military formation. There may have been an advance-guard—my camel was much too tired for me to go and find out—but there was certainly no rear-guard, and so far as I could see there were no flank-guards. I have no doubt that Lawrence would have told me that we were surrounded by a screen of trusty Bedouin, but no Bedouin were trusty to me, and Lawrence, with his racing stud, had pushed ahead long ago. However, it was no good worrying, and we jolted along resignedly until, after eight hours' ride, we reached the Hejaz railway again at Nasib. Here Nuri staged a full-dress attack upon the station, which drew off the guard from the big bridge that Lawrence had decided to blow up as our final contribution to General Allenby's plan. While he was laying his charges, the detachment crawled across the line, leaving the guns to the last to occupy the Turks in their station defences. As

soon as night fell Pisani followed, and Lawrence touched off his fuses. There was a deafening roar, and a blaze which lit up the country for miles. By its light I saw the abutment arch of the bridge sheered clean off and the whole mass of masonry sliding slowly down into the valley below.

It was with a sigh of relief that I joined the last detachment and crossed again to the east of the line. We were all dead tired and lay down just as we were only a mile from the wrecked bridge, to sleep till dawn. Hardly had we started again when we were alarmed by a shell falling in the middle of us. The Turks had brought up a gun from Amman in the night, and we were a tempting target. At the same time a plane came out from Deraa and spotted for the gunners. Luckily no great harm was done, and we soon got out of range, arriving at last at our rendezvous at Umm Taiyeh, where we found Joyce and the armoured cars.

It was now the 18th September. More than ninety miles away to the south-west General Allenby had just completed the preparations for his great attack, which was to be launched next morning. Between him and our tiny force lay the whole Turkish Army, stretching across from Arsuf on the sea to Amman on the Hejaz railway only forty miles away. We were more than two hundred miles from our own base, as our original plan of basing the flying column on Azraq and keeping the line between Deraa and Damascus cut for an indefinite time had been upset by General Allenby's change of date. The supply organisation which we could have arranged if we had had longer time, and had not been upset by stunts, was not available. We had only a few days' ammunition, petrol, and

rations for our motley force. Lines of communication we had none, and even to get back from Azraq to Aba'l Lissan would have been a difficult business ; but there was no immediate question of going back. Until we knew the result of General Allenby's operations we must clearly stay within reach. At the same time it was not going to be very comfortable. The Turks in Deraa had eight or nine aeroplanes while we now had none. They knew all about us and were unlikely to leave us alone. We could not even rely upon the villagers, who would be encouraged by any retirement of our small force to turn against us, as they had in fact already turned against Joyce and Stirling when they passed through Taiyibe the day before. The supply problem was also becoming acute. The Sherifian troops and the camels might live on the country so long as the natives were with us, but the British, Egyptian, and Indian units not only swelled the ration strength, but would be useless without petrol, spares, and explosive.

Peake and his men had done all and more than all that had been asked of them. They had put five continuous miles of the main Damascus-Deraa railway and telegraph lines so completely out of action that they were not repaired for nine days. It was not until the 26th September, only two days before Deraa itself was entered by the British and Arab forces, that a solitary train got through to Damascus, and on the same day the line was again cut by the Sherifian detachment. The result was that during the whole of General Allenby's great advance the Turks were fighting without any hope of reinforcement or supply from Damascus. Unless he had some new task to lay upon us, our work was

done, and we decided that Peake at any rate should march back to Azraq, where I had arranged for a small convoy to come up from Aba'l Lissan if any camels could be collected there. Even if they found no supplies at Azraq they had just enough to get them safely back. On the way they would try to do a little damage to the line near Mafrak, the next station south of Nasib. Meanwhile we must lie low at Umm Taiyeh and collect what supplies we could.

Very soon after Peake had marched off, Lawrence decided to borrow a car and follow him to Azraq, where a machine from G.H.Q. was due to land on the 20th to let us know how General Allenby was getting on. I think Lawrence was anxious to make sure that Peake did not encounter the same difficulties as he had met with on his way up. He also wanted to fly across to G.H.Q. and get some aeroplanes to help us against the Turks. This meant clearing a landing-ground at Umm Taiyeh, but everyone was much too tired to do anything that day. Next morning, the 19th, we held a council of war. We had been bombed more than once on the 18th, and planes were already coming out again from Deraa. Some of our men had been killed, and there seemed to be no point in staying at Umm Taiyeh when we could slip away to Umm as Surab, an old Roman village on the way to Azraq, where we might escape notice altogether. Joyce and Nuri decided to make the move that night, Joyce himself going right through with Stirling to Aba'l Lissan, where all the administrative work of our far-flung battle-line had been accumulating for over a week. This left me as the only representative of the "Hedgehog" staff with the detachment.

We reached Umm as Surab at dawn on the 20th, and I at once set about clearing an aerodrome. For this I wanted a working-party of forty men from the detachment, and I was promised them by eleven o'clock. At half-past eleven only ten men had appeared, so I walked over to the Sherifian officers' quarters to see what had happened. The administrative command was in some mysterious way divided between Ali Jaudat Beg and Tahsin Ali, Iraqis both. The gunners were under Jamil al Madfa'i, another Iraqi. All three were reclining in a disused grain-pit. "What about my working-party?" I asked. "Pray honour us," they said, "and have a cup of coffee." "Sorry," I replied, "but I want to get on with clearing the aerodrome. Could I have my working-party?" "There are no more men available, I'm afraid," said Ali Jaudat. "Have you got any, Jamil?" "Afraid not," said Jamil. "Oh, come," I said, "you must be able to produce forty men. You promised me them." "Perhaps later on," said Tahsin Ali, "but they are all busy now." "But look here," I said, "you saw Junor crash at Tel Arar because we hadn't time to clear a proper landing-ground. I only want to make sure that no one else crashes. Machines may be coming over at any time from G.H.Q., and we simply must be ready for them." They looked at each other and then repeated that no more men were available. "Well, it's a most extraordinary thing," I said. "When it comes to paying out the weekly 'guinea' service allowance, you show a strength of six hundred, and now you can't even produce forty to save the lives of our pilots," and I walked off.

For some hours we worked away with my ten

men, but no more came, and when night fell we had done very little, so I went to Sherif Násir's tent to get his help. I found him sitting surrounded by the Sherifian officers, who all looked rather sourly at me as I saluted and sat down. "I have a complaint, sir," I said to Násir. "Yes," said he, "and these men have a complaint against you!" "How so?" I asked. "They say that you accused them to their faces of putting in false returns for the weekly guinea," said Násir. "Nay, nay," said I, "I did no such thing, but if I have offended, I will make amends. In my country, those who have erred put on a white sheet, and stand with lighted candle in the mosque for such time as is needful. This or any other penance I am prepared to do, if but the aerodrome be cleared." "With us," said Násir, "he who is in the wrong dashes his head against a stone." "Bring me a stone, then," I cried, "and I will dash my brains out, so only that the aerodrome be cleared." There was a silence. Then Násir shouted at the top of his voice, "I am very angry!" I waited in some trepidation. "Yes," he cried, "I am very angry indeed with you, Ali Jaudat, and with Tahsin and Jamil. How could you bring me such a tale? See that a hundred men are ready at dawn to clear the ground for the aeroplanes and I will come myself at noon to see that all is done." And it was so. By evening of the 21st we had cleared a great space, on which machines could land safely in any wind.

During those two days we had mercifully not been seen by the Turkish machines, though they had skimmed again and again quite close by our hiding-place. I have seen somewhere a picturesque story that we disposed ourselves about the landscape on

this occasion in the guise of black stones, in order to escape observation. I do not know where this idea came from. It cannot have come from Lawrence, as he was not there. What we did actually do was to hide in the disused grain-pits whenever a machine flew by, and to send all the camels far away, from dawn to dusk, with orders to the men who were with them to stay quite still and not to look up at aeroplanes.

Early on the morning of the 22nd, Kirkbride and I were frying sausages for breakfast when I heard a louder roar of engines than before, and shouted the usual warning. I was always the first to hear aeroplanes, as my grain-pit was roofed over by my tiny bivouac tent, and the sound came to me sooner than to others. Looking up, I saw three machines coming straight at us from the north, and thought we were discovered at last, but as they approached I saw the Allied markings and rushed out with a landing-signal. One by one the three machines landed on our cleared ground without mishap and out stepped Lawrence, who had been to look for us at Umm Taiyeh with news from G.H.Q. This is the message he had brought from General Allenby to Sherif Feisal, dated the 20th September :

“I send Your Highness my greetings and my most cordial congratulations upon the great achievement of your gallant troops about Deraa, the effect of which has, by throwing the enemy's communications into confusion, had an important bearing upon the success of my own operations.

“Thanks to our combined efforts, the Turkish army is defeated and is everywhere in full retreat.

“This morning my cavalry occupied Afuleh, and pushing thence rapidly south-eastward, entered



Beisan this evening, thus closing to the enemy his last line of escape.

"My infantry yesterday captured Tulkeram, and are now pursuing the enemy eastward to Nablus.

"Prisoners already counted number 8,000 and we have taken over 100 guns, as well as a great mass of war material of every description, the extent of which it is not at present possible to estimate.

"Already the Turkish Army in Syria has suffered a defeat from which it can scarcely recover. It rests upon us now, by the redoubled energy of our attacks, to turn defeat into destruction."

To this was attached a summary of the operations on the 19th and 20th, with a note from Dawnay that the infantry had occupied Nablus on the morning of the 21st.

It may be imagined how this news excited us all. We could hardly believe our eyes, and when Lawrence told us that the cavalry had actually been in Nazareth at dawn on the 20th, and had narrowly missed capturing Liman von Sanders himself, the excitement knew no bounds. The British officers and pilots gathered round our sausages and discussed the wonderful news, while all the Arabs rushed about, shouting at the top of their voices: "We have taken Nazareth! We have taken Afuleh! We have taken Beisan! We have taken Nablus! *Liyahiya Alanbi! Liyahiya Sayedna Feisal!*" Through the babel of shouts and joy-shots I thought I heard another machine, and said so, but no one paid any attention and I thought I must have been mistaken. A moment or two later the roar of the engines became unmistakable, and sure enough there were the Turkish aeroplanes from Deraa coming out on their daily reconnaissance.

They were right over our heads now, and seeing our three machines they dropped two bombs on them, luckily missing their mark. Then they turned and fled, but our own pilots were up in the air in a moment and shot down one of them before our eyes within the next five minutes. After cursing the look-out, who had left his post to join in the general rejoicings, we went back to our breakfast, but before long the enemy aircraft were after us again. Again our pilots went up, and chased them back to Deraa, shooting one down on almost the exact spot where they had forced down Junor four days before. This finally sickened them, and they never troubled us again.

While this was going on, Lawrence told us more about what had been happening in Palestine. The effect of the operations on the 19th and 20th had been to swing the battle-front round through a right angle, the pivot being the left of the Turkish line at the north end of the Dead Sea. Here stood our old enemy the Fourth Army, as yet almost intact, and it was against them that the next drive would come. Meanwhile the cavalry were to push across to Deraa and Damascus in the hope of finally cutting off their retreat and that of the remnants of the Seventh and Eighth Armies, which had been smashed to pieces. Anything we could do to check the Fourth Army would be useful, and Allenby wanted us to make sure that railway communication was denied to them. The only Handley-Page machine on the Palestine front would fly over to us that afternoon with petrol for our cars and for the two Bristols which were to be left with us, and rations for our British personnel. Lawrence himself would fly on to Azraq in one of the Bristols to

tell Feisal what had happened, and bring him up by car to join us. The pilot of the Handley-Page was one of those who were now chasing the Turkish machines to Deraa, and had come to see whether our aerodrome was fit for the big machine. It was lucky that I had got a good working-party out of Sherif Násir the day before. Even so, more work had to be done to make the aerodrome good enough to satisfy him, and he flew away to G.H.Q. as soon as he had shown me what he wanted.

Punctually at three o'clock he came back in the Handley-Page, with attendant escort, and all landed safely. Later in the afternoon came Lawrence and Feisal from Azraq in the Vauxhall, and we planned an attack on the line for the following day, the Handley-Page flying back to Palestine in the evening, with a promise to come back and bomb Mafrak station on the night of the 24th.

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## CHAPTER X

### CLIMAX (DAMASCUS, 1918)

Military problems. Riding to Shaikh Saad. Turkish retreat. Final demolitions. Anxious moments. Left at the post. Harassing the fugitives. Deraa. Meeting with British cavalry. Back to the Army again. Capture of Damascus. Triumphal entry. Administrative arrangements. Local resources. Currency. Advance to Aleppo. Leave to England. Foreign Office

WE were now a complete unit again, with aeroplanes and armoured cars fully provisioned. Also we had our tails well up, and sallied bravely forth in broad daylight on the 23rd to make one more break in the line between Nasib and Mafrak. This was a repetition of the big demolition at Tel Arar, though on a smaller scale, and resulted in more than half a mile of line being out of action. The Turks had roughly repaired the bridge blown up by Lawrence from the armoured car on the 16th and it gave us great pleasure to set light to their makeshift trestles. The 24th was a quiet day, spent in moving quietly back to Umm Taiyeh, where we had a better chance of getting supplies. Lawrence and Winterton made a raid on the line with the armoured cars, but this was more for fun than anything else, as there was no chance of the Turks repairing the break we had made on the previous day. During the night the Handley-Page came over and bombed Mafrak station, according to plan, and thus completed beyond redemption the ruin of the railway south of Deraa.

The question now was what to do next, and we held a pow-wow at Umm Taiyeh, while fifteen

miles away at Mafrak the bombs crashed down and the station buildings blazed up into the night. We were all a little intoxicated with General Allenby's and our own success, and it was not easy to form a cool judgment. Our difficulty was made greater by the fact that we had no single controlling authority but General Allenby, who had given us no further orders. In Stirling's absence I was representing Joyce, and felt a kind of responsibility for keeping our movements at least quasi-military. Feisal had gone back to Azraq leaving Sherif Násir again in charge of tribal levies, but so far as I know without giving him any definite orders. Nuri remained in command of the regular detachment, responsible to Feisal for its general movements, but quite independent as a military commander.

Lawrence was of course his own master. I found out afterwards that he thought we were all under his orders, but I did not know this at the time, and still regarded him more as Feisal's liaison officer with General Allenby than as a real Colonel in the army, a position which he gave the impression of holding in great contempt. I had never been taken into his confidence, and knew nothing about his political schemes. All I knew was that as a military unit we had done our job, and done it well. We were on the flank of the retreating Fourth Army, who might well be more than twenty times our strength. The 4th Cavalry Division were rapidly advancing on Deraa, and the 5th on Damascus, in the hope of intercepting them. The Sherifian regular detachment and attached units, in whom alone could any reliance be placed from a military point of view, and without whom the great raid could never have been achieved, numbered about 600

men, with six guns and ten machine-guns. Its marching pace was not more than two miles an hour, if that, and its tactical mobility was very small. There was no prospect of it holding a defensive position against greatly superior numbers, or attacking any formed body of troops which was prepared to fight. We knew that our raid had given rise to the wildest rumours, and we had good reason to hope that its moral effect had been as great as its material results, but we did not know till later that there was no real prospect of the Fourth Army putting up any fight on its way to Damascus. It was not in fact till after the capture of Amman on the 24th that the Fourth Army Commander ordered his men to retreat to Damascus as best they could, and not to keep military formation, as a large Arab army was behind them. For all we knew, a force of 10,000 men might be retiring in good order up the line, in which case the only rôle for the detachment, apart from demolition raids like those it had just done, would be to harass their flanks and rear with the problematical help of the Arab irregulars. For this purpose, and for possible future demolitions, it was well placed to the east of the railway, where ran its own lines of communication, such as they were. Another point was that the camels were exhausted by their long march from Akaba and badly needed rest.

It seemed to me obvious that our best course was to hang about on the east of the line in the neighbourhood of Deraa, to do our best to worry the Fourth Army as it passed us along the railway, and to wait for the 4th Division. In this position we could safely withdraw at any time, if need be, into the Jebel Druze, where we could support ourselves

indefinitely if all went well, or find our way back to Azraq if anything went wrong. Lawrence, on the other hand, was all for moving north of Deraa and facing the retreating Turks. Accustomed as he was to the uncanny mobility of his body-guard and of the Bedouin irregulars, he did not in the least realise how clumsy and immobile the Sherifian detachment was. He had never ridden with it except for a few hours during the great raid, and even then he was not tied to its exasperatingly slow pace. His idea was that we should plant ourselves somewhere near the line, in the low-lying country which stretched northwards from Deraa, and hold up the remnants of the Fourth Army if they got past before the 4th Division could catch them.

This seemed to me unsound, and I said so. It would bring us into the direct line of retreat not only of the Fourth Army, but also of the remnants of the Turkish forces west of the Jordan, and our tiny force would be in the position of the hunter who stands in the only line of escape of the driven lion, instead of waiting on a flank to shoot him as he dashes by. I was supported by all the soldiers of the party, and we managed at last to make Lawrence see that we were right in this, but he still thought it would be unbearably dull to stay where we were, and was determined to cross over to some place west of the line. We discussed a number of alternatives, and Sherif Násir eventually agreed that we should cross to the west of the line north of Ghazale station and plant ourselves at the village of Shaikh Saad, which stood on rising ground well clear of the railway, some thirteen miles north of Deraa. None of the soldiers liked this plan very much, but provided that we got across safely, and



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eventually took up a position well clear of the main line of the Turkish retreat, they were prepared to accept it.

We marched from Umm Taiyeh on the morning of the 25th, having sent back the armoured cars to Azraq, since they could not cross the line. The Bristol fighters also left us, as we had no excuse for keeping them, and took with them news of our position and movements. Ghazale station, near which we were to cross the line, was eighteen miles from Umm Taiyeh, and just over eleven from Shaikh Saad. We could not hope to do the thirty miles in a day, so we must halt for the night on the east of the line as near Ghazale as possible without putting our heads into a noose. Hardly had we started when one of our Bristols flew back and dropped us a message that a large body of enemy cavalry was advancing upon us from the railway. This was alarming. A large body might be anything from a regiment to a brigade, and if we stood to fight them we might find ourselves caught. The only thing to do was to plod on and trust to luck, at the same time sending some of the Bedouin to find out what was happening. Luck was on our side. The so-called cavalry turned out to be the remnants of the broken Fourth Army, between three and four thousand strong, streaming north in the disorganised masses which their commander had ordained. The Bedouin swooped down on them and picked up some stragglers, but they did not of course head off the main stream, which moved along parallel with us towards Deraa, and in full sight.

We halted for the night five miles north of Taiyibe, between the villages of Naime and Seida,

and again discussed what we had better do. We knew now that Deraa was filling up, and the probability was that the column we had seen that day would be moving on again within the next twenty-four hours. We had also to reckon with the rear-guard of the force which the 4th Division were driving before them, who must be due in Deraa at any time, if they were not there already. My doubts of the wisdom of crossing the line were renewed by the unexpectedly early appearance of the fleeing Turks. Demoralised they certainly were, but a rest at Deraa, and the arrival of the remnant of the Seventh and Eighth Armies might well hearten them. We had only covered a third of the distance to Shaikh Saad and were little if anything ahead of them. I impressed upon Lawrence the vital importance of our reaching our lair at Shaikh Saad by the following night, if we were still to follow his plan, and though he promised me that this should be done, I was still not at all happy.

As it turned out we did not reach the line, some two miles north of Ghazale station, until well on in the afternoon of the 26th. While the column trailed on we did a final demolition, as Peake's long break at Tel Arar had just been repaired, and a train (in which, though we did not know it, were Colonel von Oppen and 700 Germans, described in the Official History as "still in good spirits and fighting fit") had got through from Deraa that morning on its way to Damascus. By cutting the line once more we forced all the Turkish remnants in Deraa to retreat by road, thus delaying them beyond all hope of escape, and to this extent our march northward had fully justified itself, but the danger of crossing the line was proportionately

increased, as the roads to Damascus lay on the other side. By nightfall we had only reached Namir al Hawa, five miles to the east of the direct road from Damascus to Deraa, and to my dismay the force off-saddled and prepared to camp for the night.

I walked over to Lawrence and Násir and begged them to agree that we should march at moonrise. I am afraid Lawrence thought me very persistent. Shaikh Saad was only twelve and a half miles away, and, travelling light as he always did, he could easily reach it in three hours. He tried to ride me off, but I held him to his promise that we should get to Shaikh Saad that night, and in the end the detachment was ordered to march with the moon at about ten. I was so anxious that I could not lie down, and kept pacing restlessly about with my watch in my hand, torturing myself with visions of the confusion that would be caused by a night attack on our tired force. When the moon rose I looked for some movement, and finding none I walked round and roused the sleepers, all except Lawrence and Násir and their light-moving followers. With some difficulty Nuri and I at last got the detachment started, and a painful night-march began. The moon was as bright as day, but the going was very bad for the camels, and we were delayed by some wretched prisoners who had been dragged with us all the way from Taiyibe, so that our progress was very slow.

We crossed the road at Shaikh Miskin a little after midnight, and halted at 3 a.m. about five miles short of Shaikh Saad. We were all too tired to go on, and lay down just as we were to get a few hours' sleep. Even now we were only two or three miles from the main road, but we were at least across it,

and could, I suppose, have got away if we had been attacked, though we should have had a bad time in the darkness. I often wonder what would have happened to us if Lieutenant-Colonel von Hammerstein, who actually marched through Shaikh Miskin only twelve hours later with the 146th German regiment, had come upon us while we were filing along the narrow street of the village ; or if Colonel von Oppen and his 700 Germans had failed to get through by train and had continued their retreat by road. I admit that I had not then heard of either of these gentlemen, but the risk that I now know we ran was the identical risk that I then said we were running, and I think now, as I thought then, that it was unjustifiable.

Morning of the 27th September found us safely at Shaikh Saad, but very weary. The detachment pitched camp under the trees, and I helped Ali Jaudat and Tahsin to see about rations for their men and for the prisoners. Násir and Lawrence arrived almost as soon as we did, having covered our nine hours' march in just under three hours. A few minutes afterwards we were surprised by the appearance of a small detachment of Turks, with whom were a few Austrian and German engineers, retiring from Deraa. These were rounded up by the Bedouin, robbed of all they possessed and herded with the other prisoners into a field, where we fed them and gave them water. Then I looked about for my bivouac tent, as I had had little sleep that night and could hardly keep my eyes open. I was annoyed to find that the kindly Winterton had had it pitched beside his own in a little dell some distance away from the Sherifian officers, thinking that I should like to be undisturbed. I knew only

too well how dangerous it was to be separated from the detachment, and bitterly upbraided Winterton for his thoughtfulness. He cursed me in return for my unparliamentary language, and we were glaring at each other in a not very dignified way, when suddenly one of our machines flew over and dropped us a message. This said that the 10th Brigade of Barrow's 4th Division was two miles west of Rimtha, and that two columns of retreating Turks, one of two thousand from Mezerib and one of four thousand from Deraa, were advancing upon Shaikh Miskin. I thanked my stars that we were safely across the road, and took the message to Nuri, who decided to give his tired force a short rest before sallying forth, while Lawrence and his braves, who had had a better night and were comparatively fresh, dashed off to see what was happening. After begging Nuri to let me know when he was starting, I lay down in my distant shelter and fell asleep.

An hour or two later I awoke in an ominous stillness. Rushing outside, I ran across to the Sherifian camp, only to find that the detachment had disappeared, leaving a small guard over the prisoners and baggage. Bitterly disappointed, I roused Winterton, who was as angry as I was to find that we had been left behind, and apologised most handsomely for having been the unwitting cause of our being marooned. It was particularly maddening to me to be left out of what promised to be the climax of all my labours, and I half thought of mounting my faithful camel and venturing out alone as I had done from Tel Arar when I was left behind before. But this time I did not even know which way to go, and reluctantly decided that I

could only sit still. Not that there was much sitting still. Another machine dropped a message asking us to prepare a landing-ground, and we had no one to do it with but the Turkish prisoners. These poor wretches were not really in a state to do anything, and the Sherifian officer who was put in charge of them did not get much out of them. We had to take the job on ourselves, and managed, with the help of an Arabic-speaking Turkish non-commissioned officer, to clear a large enough space in the course of the afternoon.

At nightfall the detachment came back with terrible tales of Turkish atrocities at Tafas village, three miles north-west of Deraa, and of Arab reprisals. Ali Jaudat told me that he and Lawrence had tried vainly to save a batch of prisoners from being massacred by the Bedouin, whose latent savagery had been aroused by the sight of butchered women and children. He told me too that a Bedouin horde had swept into Deraa, the flames of whose burning showed that the Turks had abandoned it. The detachment was to march at dawn and take formal possession of the town in the name of the Arabs, leaving the Bedouin to harass the retreating Turks, who were streaming through Shaikh Miskin, with a formidable German rear-guard who had beaten off all attacks. The 4th Division were on the hills between Rimtha and Deraa, and it was politically important that the Arabs should win the race. There was some wild talk among the irregulars of killing the unhappy creatures who had been working at our aerodrome, and the rest of the evening was spent in a series of false alarms that they were to be massacred, relieved for a moment by a celebration dinner to

Pisani, who made us an impassioned speech on the best French lines.

We marched for Deraa before dawn on the morning of the 28th and reached it at about ten o'clock, to find General Barrow installed in the railway station, Sherif Násir and Lawrence in the town, and a certain liveliness between the allied forces. The General had entered Deraa to find it in an appalling state owing to the excesses of the Bedouin. Until the Sherifian detachment arrived, there was no sign of any organised Arab force, and he naturally hesitated to leave at the mercy of what he regarded as a pack of ragamuffins a town which had been evacuated by the Turks as a result of his own advance. Lawrence had adopted with him what I am told was his usual attitude towards British Generals, a mixture of schoolboy cheek with an assumption of omniscience and of being in General Allenby's confidence which Barrow found extremely trying. Even when our comparatively orderly force appeared, he was inclined to be a little contemptuous at first, and I have no doubt that we presented an odd spectacle to eyes accustomed to British and Indian units. This soon passed off, though, and he and his staff were hospitality itself to the rather dishevelled group of British officers.

I was satisfied now that my job was done. From a military point of view the Hejaz operations were over, and the Arab force had only a political existence. I knew nothing about Arab policy in Syria, and felt that I could be of little use if I stayed with the detachment. On the other hand, my experience with local resources in Mesopotamia might well prove useful to the British forces. The cavalry were advancing at the rate of thirty miles a day, and it



seemed to me likely that they would want barley at Damascus just as much as General Maude's cavalry had wanted it at Baghdad. As Joyce had not yet turned up, I got Lawrence to wire to G.H.Q. making this suggestion, and that same night, as soon as the answer came, I transferred my allegiance, with my camel and mule, from the Arab Army to the Desert Mounted Corps.

It was with real regret that I marched out of Deraa with Barrow's headquarters staff on the 29th September and saw my gallant camels picking their way delicately along on the far-distant right flank, with my companions of the last nine months. Working with the Arabs had been the greatest fun, and if I had felt that there was anything I could usefully do in their company I should willingly have stayed with them. At the same time I could not help being glad that I was back in the Army again, and as I rode along, bearded and head-kerchiefed on my mule, I delighted in the military precision and punctuality of the British and Indian gunners and cavalry.

After passing through Shaikh Miskin, the village we had filed through so painfully three nights before, we halted for the night at Dilli, five miles farther north. Next day we reached Zeraqiyah, where I was summoned soon after we halted to interview a mysterious visitor who demanded to see the G.O.C. This turned out to be an Arab general in the Turkish Army who had been entrusted by the Turks with the organisation and command of their last line of defence south of Damascus. He told me with glee that he had purposely disposed his troops in an indefensible position, and had then secretly left them to place himself at the disposal of the

British Army. He was sure that the Divisional Commander would be delighted to see him, and asked me to take him to General Barrow at once. I was not so sure as he was, but took him along and had the doubtful pleasure of interpreting the answers in which he described the strength, or rather weakness, of his recent masters. The conversation was accompanied by dull explosions from the direction of Damascus, seven miles away, where the Turks were destroying the wireless station and railway buildings in the suburb of Qadam and blowing up their dumps.

We marched again before dawn on the 1st October and were in Damascus by breakfast-time. It is interesting to compare the situation with that which existed in Baghdad at the time of its capture by General Maude eighteen months before. The policy in both capitals was ostensibly the same. We had come to Baghdad as we came to Damascus, "not as conquerors but as liberators." We had been bound in Mesopotamia, as we were in Syria, by the promise given to Sherif Hussein in 1916 that we would "recognise and support the independence of the Arabs," and it had been our object in the ancient capital of the Abbasid caliphs, no less than in that of the Ommeyyads, to re-establish the glories of Arab rule. There were, however, two very important factors governing the situation at Damascus which had not affected us when we took Baghdad. In the first place, our promise was qualified, so far as Syria was concerned, by the reservation that we could only enter upon any undertaking "so far as we were free to act without detriment to the interests of our ally, France." In the second place, we had with us in Damascus, in the person of

Sherif Feisal, a living embodiment of the independence of the Arabs. The principle of Arab independence had been recognised, so far as Damascus was concerned, by the French Government equally with the British ; but so long as operations were in progress, and indeed until peace was concluded, full responsibility must rest with the military commander. General Allenby had therefore to decide to what extent Arab independence in Damascus could be reconciled with military control, and the existence of the organised Sherifian force which had contributed so signally to his victory made it possible for him to hand over the civil administration in a way which would have been out of the question at Baghdad.

I was in the Victoria Hotel on the morning of the 3rd October, when a small fleet of motor-cars suddenly drove up, and the Commander-in-Chief himself appeared on a flying visit to General Chauvel, the commander of the Desert Mounted Corps. Almost at the same moment I heard that Feisal had arrived at Qadam and was on the point of making a triumphal entry into Damascus. I thought General Allenby should know this, and burst in upon him with the news. "Tell him to come and see me at once," said he. I explained that there might be some difficulty about this, as Feisal was due in half an hour at the Municipality, where all the notables of Damascus were gathered to receive him. But General Allenby was in a hurry, and could not wait for Arab receptions, so I asked for a car, and was given a huge red Mercédès, which I believe had been taken at Liman von Sanders's headquarters at Nazareth.

I drove off at full speed and met Feisal riding in

from Qadam at the head of a large band of horsemen through narrow streets thronged with exultant Damascenes. Jumping out of the car, I ran and hailed him. We had not met since Umm Taiyeh, as he had driven into Deraa just after the 4th Division marched out, and he welcomed me with his charming smile. I told him that General Allenby would be at the hotel for only a few minutes more, and was most anxious to meet him, and that I had brought a car in which he could drive quickly to the hotel and be back at the Municipality for the reception. He asked me to bring the car up from where I had left it, but before I could reach him through the press he galloped on, leaving me to follow. The result was that I drove in splendour for some distance, embarrassed by the plaudits of the crowd, who naturally took me for the hero of the hour, and caught him up just as he reached the hotel. The room in which I had left General Allenby and his staff was quite empty when I showed him in, and I thought for a moment that I had made a mistake, but they had only stepped out to the balcony to watch Feisal ride up, and in another moment the Arab leader and the British Commander-in-Chief met for the first time.

After mutual thanks and congratulations, General Allenby told Feisal that the Supreme Council of the Allies had recognised the belligerent status of the Arabs. This rather gravelled Lawrence, who was interpreting, and also puzzled Feisal, who had been fighting away for two years without suspecting that there was any doubt about his belligerent status, but he listened carefully when General Allenby went on to explain the arrangements he proposed to make for the administration of the

country. An Arab military administration would be set up in the whole area east of the Jordan from Akaba to Damascus. The military governors and civil officials throughout this area would be Arabs, and would work under direct orders from Feisal, who would himself be responsible to General Allenby so long as war conditions prevailed. Feisal would communicate with G.H.Q. through Clayton, General Allenby's Chief Political Officer, and would have with him Cornwallis as liaison officer. In deference to French claims a French liaison officer would also be appointed. The Arabs would have no status in Palestine west of the Jordan or in the occupied territories along the Syrian coast. The Sherifian flag must disappear from Beyrout, where it had been hoisted the day before, and the administration of the coastal strip would be entrusted to the French, also of course under General Allenby's own supreme command.

These arrangements made a great difference to my work. In Baghdad the Local Resources Department had been dealing with a British Military Administration, and except for the first few days at Museyib, where I had more or less set up my own tiny arrangements, we had always had to do with British military governors or Political officers in executive control of the Arabs. I had now to work with an Arab administration which was only in process of being established, and half my time was spent in trying to help to organise the departments with which I must come in contact. The arrangements of the Q branch of the Desert Mounted Corps, to which I was attached, had proved almost, but not quite equal to coping with the almost miraculously rapid advance of the cavalry from Jaffa to Damascus.

It would be some days before the line was established again, and in the meanwhile we must use to the utmost the resources of the area under our control. This would have been comparatively simple, if we had not also had to supply the Turkish wounded and prisoners, and if we had had plenty of money. Requisitioning would have made the job easier, but we did not want to requisition if we could avoid it. I think it was on the 4th October that I found a scrap of paper in my room at the Hotel Victoria which said something like this :

CAPTAIN YOUNG.

With effect from to-morrow morning you will provide from local resources rations and forage for the following :

22,000 men  
28,000 horses  
5,000 Turkish sick and wounded  
15,000 Turkish prisoners.

Acknowledge.

E. F. T.  
D.A. and Q.M.G.

I cannot vouch for the exact figures, but they are near enough.

I went over to Corps Headquarters with this note in my hand and asked to see Q. He told me that he was very sorry, but some lorry column that he had been expecting had been delayed, and the men must be fed somehow. Forage for the horses I should have to provide for some time. I said I would do what I could, and asked where to go for the money. "Money?" he said. "We've got no money. Some Egyptian notes are coming up later on, but you must get along without money for

a few days." I then went to the B.G.G.S., and asked if he could do anything. He said he thought a Turkish safe had been taken at Qadam, but it would take some time to open it, and there might of course be nothing inside it. He would call for all captured Turkish paper money if that was any use to me. I then tried the Sherifians, but they wanted every piastre they could lay hands on for their own administration. In despair I sought out Feisal himself and begged him to lend me five thousand sovereigns from his last subsidy. He willingly agreed, though he had not much more than five thousand left, and I managed to arrange with local contractors to supply all Q's demands from that day forward.

Currency was a difficult problem for those first weeks in Damascus. Paper money was all at a discount. The *suq* was full of English five-pound notes, some good and some said to be forgeries, which could be bought when we first took the city at the rate of three for five gold sovereigns. I did not know enough about them to risk changing any of my precious five thousand for them, but I did buy six for myself out of what was left of my last month's pay, and should have bought more if I had been able. When I got home I warned the cashier at Cox's where I had got them, but he ran them over with a practised finger and put them straight into his drawer. Turkish paper was almost valueless, and Egyptian notes, which had not been seen for some years, were even lower than our own bank-notes. Remembering what had been done to establish rupee notes when we first reached Baghdad, I suggested that we should do the same in Damascus for the Egyptian note. This would have meant de-

positing a certain amount of gold or silver with the banks and getting the administration to let it be known that Egyptian notes up to some small maximum, say five pounds, would be cashed in gold on demand. A very long queue would have presented itself on the first day, three or four hundred people on the second, and no one on the third. We were paying Feisal a large subsidy in gold on the first of each month, some proportion if not the whole of which might just as well be paid in paper, once the paper currency was established.

For some reason which I have never been able to fathom, this suggestion was turned down by G.H.Q. Not only was it turned down, but an official telegram was sent to General Chauvel ordaining that the Egyptian note must be accepted at its face value, and no higher prices paid for supplies than those laid down in General Routine Order No. XYZ issued at Jerusalem on some date in the preceding August. It was one thing for G.H.Q. to lay down that the Egyptian note must be accepted at its face value, and quite another for me to induce the contractors of Damascus or the Sherifian Supply Department, with whom I had many dealings, to bow to this decree. Neither of them, in fact, paid the slightest attention to it, and the result was that the second part of the order had simply to be ignored. It was difficult enough in any case to get the amount of stuff the Corps wanted, and there was no alternative but to buy it at the lowest price at which it was obtainable.

I went on gaily doing this for some time, when I was suddenly summoned to Corps Headquarters to see the Q.M.G. himself, who had come up at the first opportunity to inspect the supply and trans-



port arrangements. Conscious of having done fairly well in rather difficult circumstances, I marched in with my head well up. To my astonishment he greeted me with "Are you Young? What the devil have you been doing here?" "Well, sir," I said, "what have I been doing? I didn't expect you to speak to me like that." "Why not?" he asked. "You have apparently been paying more than the prices laid down in General Routine Orders for forage and supplies. What have you got to say for yourself?" I said what I had to say, and as soon as he realised what the difficulties had been he was friendly enough. Before I left him, he asked what he could do to help me, and I said that I only wanted his authority for all I had done. This he gave me at once, and it was just as well that I got it, for nearly two years later, when I was working in the Foreign Office, a letter came over from some department in the War Office asking for an explanation of the frequent and deplorable breaches of General Routine Order XYZ, which had been committed in Damascus by "a Captain H. W. Young, who is understood to be working in your department." I quoted the Q.M.G.'s blank cheque, and heard no more about it.

On the 9th October I was asked by Leith Ross, who was on the G staff of the Corps, to come with him in his car to Rayaq, where the 5th Cavalry Division had its headquarters. On the way he told me that orders had come from G.H.Q. for General Macandrew to push on with the 5th Cavalry Division to Homs, living on the country as he went. Q had expressed some doubt whether this could be done, and he wanted me to make enquiries about local resources between Rayaq and Homs. We

drove to a number of villages in the fertile valley between the Lebanon and the Anti-Lebanon, and I soon satisfied myself that the Division could support itself. G were delighted, and passed on the order at once, but Q were not at all pleased with me, I fear, though they realised that it was not my fault that they were overruled.

With the establishment of normal communications and the gradual development of the Sherifian administration it became possible to deal with local resources in a less hand-to-mouth fashion. A Local Resources Board was formed, with the object of co-ordinating supplies and prices throughout occupied Syria. I was nominated President of this Board, and on the 23rd October General Davies, the Director of Supplies and Transport, held a meeting at Damascus to discuss its exact scope and duties. The Financial Adviser to G.H.Q. attended the meeting, and laid down once more that currency and exchange must be as laid down in General Routine Orders. I saw no objection to this, so long as General Routine Orders paid due account to the fact that our paper currency was not yet established, and it was eventually decided that we should pay 10 per cent. more than the rates previously ordained. This was after we had been at Damascus for more than three weeks, and confidence was slowly being established. With all respect to the Financial Adviser I still maintain that if we had done what was done in Baghdad we should have saved a very large sum of money. I soon found, though, that my amateur ideas on the subject of currency were regarded as painfully unorthodox. For example, we were strictly forbidden to buy English bank-notes at a discount, on the ground

that it was disloyal and in every way improper to connive at the depreciation of British currency. I could not understand this at all, and suggested that the best way to re-establish the bank-notes was for us all to sally forth and buy them as fast as we could. I was told that this was quite wrong, and contented myself with hugging to my bosom the six which I had bought before the order came out.

On the 26th October General Macandrew entered Aleppo, and I dashed off in a Ford car to see whether it was possible to avoid the difficulties which we had experienced when we first entered Damascus. I got to Aleppo next day, and found that Nuri with the gallant Sherifian camel detachment had co-operated in the attack. Not only had he co-operated, but he had actually launched an independent attack on the Turkish position south of the town the day before it was taken. He had been driven off, it is true, but his action had been largely instrumental in forcing the Turks to evacuate the town. It was a great pleasure to meet him and my other comrades again, and to hear them so warmly spoken of by General Macandrew and his staff. The camels were rather the worse for their 500-mile march from Akaba, but the detachment had preserved its formation and discipline and looked much the same as it had done when Feisal reviewed it two months before at Aba'l Lissan. There can have been few more romantic episodes in the whole War than the movements of this tiny column, and I hope that we shall some day see a full account of them written in Arabic by its brave commander.

I stayed three nights in Aleppo, and found, as I had foreseen, that the currency problem there was the

same as that which had confronted us at Damascus. Being still convinced that I was right, I hardily renewed, in a long telegram—which I see with some confusion that I sent to no less than five addresses—my old suggestion that we should make use of the gold we were paying Feisal for the purpose of establishing the Egyptian note. Next day I telegraphed to the Financial Adviser that it was estimated that there were two million pounds' worth of English bank-notes in Aleppo, and asked what was the correct rate of exchange, and whether it should be published or not. While I was waiting for the answer, we heard, on the same day, the wonderful news of the armistice with Turkey. Nothing mattered now, and I was not unduly downcast by the very severe answer to my first telegram which reached me from G.H.Q. on the following day. This said that I was going quite outside my province in dealing with matters of currency, or communicating with the Arab Administration in such matters, and was to cease doing so at once. The Commander-in-Chief had decided that the Egyptian note must be accepted at its face value in accordance with General Routine Orders, and that gold was not to be used for army payments. The telegram ended, "You must not send priority telegrams AAA. You should return to Damascus at once."

I returned to Damascus at once, and do not know to this day what answer was sent to my telegram about the two million pounds, for a fortnight later I was on my way to England on a month's leave. I had never once been west of Port Said all through the War, nor had I had any leave except my one month in India in 1918, so I did not hesitate to apply.

It may be imagined with what excitement I boarded the ship at Beyrout for my first voyage home, and my annoyance when I found that I should have to wait for ten days at Port Said. While I was waiting there Sir George Lloyd, as he then was, passed through on his way to take up his post as Governor of Bombay. I called to see him on his ship, as we had met in Mesopotamia, and I knew how much interested he was in the Arab countries. He asked what I was proposing to do, and I told him that I had no idea, as I had been away from regimental duty for so long that I did not very much look forward to going back to it. He asked me why I did not join the new Eastern Department of the Foreign Office. When I said that I had never heard of the new Eastern Department, and that I did not see how I could possibly join it, he said he was sure that they would be only too glad to have me, as I had been on both sides of the Middle East during the War, and could give them first-hand information both about Mesopotamia and also about the Sherifians on the West. He gave me a letter of introduction to Sir Eyre Crowe and advised me to go and see him as soon as I got to London.

It took me another three weeks to get home, ten days of which were spent in a troop train between Taranto and Havre, and it was not until nearly Christmas that I set foot in England for the first time since I had left it on my return voyage to India in 1913. I took the first opportunity of calling on Sir Eyre Crowe, and found that Sir George Lloyd had been perfectly right. The immense extension of British interests in the Middle East as a result of the campaign in Mesopotamia and Palestine, and the

problems arising out of the impending settlement with Turkey, had thrown a great deal of extra work on the Foreign Office, and they were only too glad to make use of anyone who had recent experience of any part of the area with which they were called upon to deal. I was taken in at once as a seconded supernumerary, and my military career ended from that day.

## DOWNING STREET

### CHAPTER XI

#### COMMITMENTS (FOREIGN OFFICE, 1919)

The Eastern Department. International position. British military policy. Foreign Office and India Office. Negotiations with Mecca. Sykes-Picot Agreement. President Wilson. Syrian Covenanters. Framing a policy. Views of Lawrence and Colonel Wilson. Lord Curzon. The Interdepartmental Conference. The Covenant of the League. Mandates. The French in Syria. Baghdadi officers. Deir az Zor. Rumblings.

THE newly formed Eastern Department of the Foreign Office was dealing in 1919 with British policy in Turkey, the Caucasus, Persia, Syria, Mesopotamia, Arabia, and Egypt, but the section to which I was attached was concerned only with those parts of Turkey in Asia which are inhabited by a predominantly Arabic-speaking population. These were : Syria ; Palestine, including Trans-Jordania ; Arabia, including the Hejaz ; and last but not least, Mesopotamia, which for various reasons we now call Iraq.

The international position before the War—for we must go back to the time before the War if we are to understand British policy after it—was that effective Turkish occupation was only established in Iraq, Syria, Palestine and Trans-Jordania, Mecca, Medina and the coastal towns of the Hejaz, and the sea-board of Asir and Yemen. I have explained in an earlier chapter that the Turks throughout these territories were in the position of an occupying Power, and that many strong foreign

influences were at work. On the east and south of Arabia, from Koweit to Aden, the Turkish writ did not run at all, and British influence had predominated for many years, though the only territory actually under British administration was the Aden Protectorate. An Anglo-Turkish Convention which was concluded in 1913 with the object of regularising the position had not been ratified by the outbreak of war, in spite of the conclusion, in June 1914, of a frontier convention defining the boundary of Ottoman territory. British influence was strong at Baghdad and Basrah and on the waterways of Mesopotamia, but weaker in Syria and Palestine.

The other important European influences at work were French and German. The French, as the traditional protectors of Christians in Turkish dominions, had established a strong hold on the coasts of Syria, and French was the European language learned in the majority of schools, many of which were French institutions. This French influence was a relic of Crusading days, and the importance attached by the French to their position in Syria cannot be over-estimated. French education was, with the possible exception of the American College at Beyrout, the best available and was very popular locally ; but the Arabs of the Middle East had no illusions about French suzerainty, which they associated in their minds with the French policy of colonisation in Tunis, Algeria, and the coastal districts of Morocco. During the years before the War French influence had a formidable rival in the German "Drang nach Osten," and although the Germans did not succeed in making themselves very popular in Syria and Asia Minor, the building of the Baghdad railway and of the



Hejaz railway had done a good deal towards establishing German influence.

In Palestine the foreign interests were for the most part religious. Christians all over the world regarded it as a Holy Land; Christian colonies, mainly German, were established there, and Christian institutions, both religious and educational, were clustered round the traditional sites. An important element among the Jewish people, who called themselves Zionists, had for years been working towards the return of the Chosen People to their original home, an ideal which dated from the Dispersion and had never been seriously weakened either by centuries of persecution and neglect, or by well-meaning schemes for Jewish settlement in other parts of the world. Jerusalem was also one of the Holy Cities of the Moslem world, and other sites in Palestine were hallowed by the traditions which Islam derived from Judaism and Christianity alike.

In addition to these political and religious interests, Turkish sovereignty in Asia was weakened by the fact that a number of European countries were entitled, by a special arrangement known as the Capitulations, to claim certain privileges in commercial and judicial matters for their own subjects in the Turkish dominions. This privilege dated from the capture of Constantinople by the Turks in 1453, and the original letter given by Mahomad V to the Genoese merchants a few days after the city was taken can be seen hanging on the walls of the Rotunda in the British Museum Library.

Quite apart from external influences there was also a strong internal movement towards independence. The Arab is a very independent gentle-

man, so much so that this movement was difficult to focus, but efforts were being made to focus it for some years before the War. The Committee of Arab Brotherhood was formed in 1908 as a consequence of the unwise attitude taken towards the Arabs by the Turkish Committee of Union and Progress. This Arab Committee was dissolved the following year, but it was replaced by an organisation which called itself the Arts Club, which remained in existence till the outbreak of war, when most of its members were called to the colours as Turkish subjects and it naturally came to an end. Another very important Committee, which remained in existence after the War, was the Committee of the Covenant, which was formed in 1909. The object of all these Associations was to secure Arab independence from Turkish domination.

Let us now throw our minds back to the outbreak of war with Turkey, on the 31st October 1914. On the Turkish side we have Turkey herself, passionately anxious to retain the few limbs that had not already been lopped from her unwieldy body, and conscious that the loss of the Holy Cities would strike the death-blow to the temporal suzerainty of the Sultan-Caliph. Behind Turkey we have Germany, with her great dream of a German Middle East, egging Turkey on for her own ends, and supplying her with every kind of moral and material help against the Allies. On the Allied side we have France, eager to consolidate her position as protector of Christians in the Orient, but unable to spare more than a negligible contribution in men and money for theatres of war outside Europe; the Zionists, hoping against hope that their long-dreamed-of charter would be granted to

them by whatever authority succeeded the Turks ; and in the area itself the widely separated Arab peoples, not yet arrived at national consciousness, but stirring uneasily in the half-formed hope that out of the defeat of Turkey they might perhaps win their freedom. Last but by no means least we have Great Britain and India, for the British influence which had gradually been growing from the East was not a purely British, but a British-Indian interest. British India, where the Middle East is concerned, is Moslem India, and Indian Moslems, as a result of political agitation which started during the Balkan Wars, attached great importance to the Caliphate of the Sultan of Turkey. They did not realise that the connection of the Caliphate with temporal power, which dates from the Turkish conquest of Arabia, would, if carried to its logical conclusion, involve a claim that the Sultan of Turkey should be temporal ruler of Moslem India ; but however illogical their view might be, it could not be ignored by British statesmen.

From the military point of view, British Policy had two main objects in the Middle East. The first was to occupy the head of the Persian Gulf, thus guarding the oilfields, protecting the many Arab allies of Great Britain in those regions, and preventing the enemy from establishing naval bases on the flank of British communications with India : the second was to keep open these same communications by the Red Sea and the Suez Canal. These two military operations were respectively entrusted to the Mesopotamian and Egyptian Expeditionary Forces, of which the first was despatched by the Indian and the second by the Home Government. For the first two years of the War, the India Office

was responsible in Whitehall both for policy and for the control of military operations in Mesopotamia, while in Egypt and Palestine the War Office was responsible for military operations and the Foreign Office for policy.

After the capture of Kut al Amara the War Office took over the control of military operations in Mesopotamia, but political responsibility in that sphere remained in the hands of the India Office. In spite of the efforts made by the Arab Bureau which advised the High Commission in Cairo, to co-ordinate British policy towards the Arab peoples, the inevitable divergence of view between the Foreign Office and the India Office was reflected in the political and administrative measures adopted in the two spheres of the Middle Eastern theatre of operations. The main political objects of the Foreign Office were to meet the susceptibilities of Great Britain's European allies, and to counteract Turkish efforts to unite the Moslems of the world in a *Jehad* or Holy War in favour of the Sultan-Caliph. The India Office, on the other hand, in its capacity as spokesman for the Government of India, was more concerned with the susceptibilities of Indian Moslems, and with the possibility of securing an outlet for Indian emigration in return for Indian sacrifices in Mesopotamia.

As early as September 1914 Lord Kitchener, seeing that Turkey would probably join the Central Powers, sent a messenger to sound Abdullah, son of the Sherif of Mecca, as to the probable attitude of his father and the Arabs. Abdullah replied favourably, provided that his father's position were recognised and upheld. His Majesty's Government sent back a message on the 31st October, the very

day on which war was finally declared with Turkey, promising that if the Arabs assisted England in the War, England would guarantee that no international intervention would take place in Arabia, and would give the Arabs every assistance against foreign aggression. It is clear that the promise given to the Sherif of Mecca by His Majesty's Government was not intended to cover any territory beyond what was ordinarily known as Arabia before the War, for on the very same day an Indian Expeditionary Force landed at Fao, and the series of operations began which ended with the British occupation of the whole of Mesopotamia. It was not indeed until the following year that the Sherif made his claim to an Arab kingdom which was to include the whole of the Arab countries.

Simultaneously with the declaration of war against Turkey the Government of India proclaimed that no question of a religious character was involved in the War, and that the Holy Places of Arabia, including the Holy Shrines of Mesopotamia and the port of Jeddah, would be immune from attack or molestation by British naval and military forces so long as there was no interference with Indian pilgrims. At the same time the Sherif was informed by His Majesty's Government that Great Britain would not change her traditionally friendly attitude towards the Arabs unless they actually assisted Turkish invaders of territory in British occupation.

Matters rested here until July 1915, when the Sherif of Mecca, on his own initiative, opened negotiations with a view to joining the Allies in the War and throwing off Turkish domination. I should explain that no other Arab ruler had ac-

cepted Sherif Hussein's suzerainty, nor could he claim to represent more than his own immediate following, but in his capacity of Guardian of the Holy Cities of Mecca and Medina he was at that time the only possible spokesman for the Arabs from the British point of view. The substance of the Sherif's offer was that he would join the Allies if England would recognise an Arab kingdom comprising the whole of the Middle East, including Syria. In view of the various interests which I have described above, it was not found possible to comply with all the Sherif's demands and certain modifications were made by His Majesty's Government. The effect of these modifications was to exclude from the area defined by the Sherif, as not being purely Arab, all territory lying to the west of the Jordan and of a line roughly producing the Jordan to the north ; to limit the area so reduced to the territories in which Great Britain was free to act without detriment to the interests of her ally France ; and to demand special measures of administrative control for Great Britain in the vilayets of Baghdad and Basrah. Subject to these modifications Great Britain was prepared to recognise and support the independence of the Arabs (not an Arab kingdom) in the territories claimed by the Sherif. The Sherif never actually accepted the modifications in so many words, but in a letter dated the 1st January 1916 he practically did so, subject to reconsideration of French claims after the War, and the fact that he did throw in his lot with the Allies shows that he was in the main satisfied with the reply so far as His Majesty's Government were concerned.

Meanwhile negotiations had been opened with

the French Government with the object of defining the territories in which His Majesty's Government were free to implement their undertaking to recognise and support the independence of the Arabs. Prolonged negotiations resulted in an agreement signed in May 1916, which is usually called the Sykes-Picot Agreement from the names of the two chief negotiators, and by which Great Britain and France undertook among other things to recognise and uphold an independent Arab State or confederation of States in Syria and Mesopotamia, with the exception of the Syrian districts which had been excluded and the Baghdad and Basrah districts which had been reserved in the British Government's reply to the Sherif. Midway across the area covered by the Agreement a line was drawn beyond which the two Governments reciprocally agreed that they would not claim any right of advising or assisting the Arab administrations.

It will be noticed that while both the reply to the Sherif and the Sykes-Picot Agreement foreshadowed special measures of administrative control in both the vilayets of Baghdad and Basrah, and made no distinction between them, the instructions issued by His Majesty's Government to General Maude after the fall of Baghdad a year later<sup>1</sup> provided that Basrah alone was to remain under British administration, and the Baghdad vilayet to be made into an Arab State. It appears from this that His Majesty's Government were already beginning to realise that direct British administration was incompatible with the satisfaction of Arab ideals. It was, however, found impossible to carry out the policy for the reasons which I have already explained,

<sup>1</sup> See p. 126.

and both Baghdad and Basrah remained under direct British administration throughout the War.

With the capture of Akaba on the 6th July 1917, the Syrian and Mesopotamian officers of Feisal's Northern Arab Army, all of whom belonged to the Committee of the Covenant, found themselves within measurable distance of Syrian territory. Towards the end of 1917 an offshoot of the Committee of the Covenant was formed among the Mesopotamian officers, under the name of the Covenant of Iraq. Few if any of these men had been in their own country since the outbreak of war, and they were regarded by our own authorities there as persons of no account, completely out of touch with the views or wishes of their fellow-countrymen. What was not fully realised was that they were in daily contact with Arab nationalists from all over the Arab countries, and that under Feisal's inspiring leadership they were rapidly developing into red-hot nationalists themselves.

On the 8th January 1918 President Wilson enunciated his Fourteen Points, of which the twelfth laid down that the nationalities other than Turkish which were then under Turkish rule should be assured an undoubted security of life and an absolutely unmolested opportunity of autonomous development. This phrase was seized upon as giving promise of great things, and eagerly discussed during the first half of 1918, when there was no great advance in the Middle East, since our troops both in Mesopotamia and Palestine were reduced to the lowest possible limit in order to meet the great German menace on the Western Front. On the 11th June, in reply to a memorial presented by seven important Syrian Covenanters, His Majesty's



Government announced that in regard to the areas in Arabia which were free and independent before the War, and areas emancipated from Turkish rule by the action of the Arabs themselves during the War, they recognised the complete and sovereign independence of the Arabs inhabiting these areas, and supported them in their struggle for freedom. The wording of this reply was perhaps unfortunate, for it cannot have been intended to cancel the whole of the correspondence with Sherif Hussein in the course of which His Majesty's Government had defined the area in which they regarded themselves as free to act. One can only suppose that whoever authorised this reply never dreamt that the tiny Arab force which was then at Aba'l Lissan and Akaba would before five months were out have taken part in the capture of Aleppo, five hundred miles away.

When I saw this document for the first time in the Foreign Office, it at once became clear to me why the Arabs had made such superhuman efforts to win their race with the British cavalry into Deraa, Damascus, and Aleppo; for while it can hardly be said that any of these areas was emancipated by the action of the Arabs themselves, the Arab forces certainly played an important part in their emancipation. I understood, too, for the first time why I had so often been asked, after the fall of Damascus, who had really taken the city. Was it the British Army or was it our Lord Feisal? I had always answered that as Feisal had at least six hundred men with him and General Chauvel not more than fifteen thousand, it did not seem to me that there could be any doubt about the reply, but I had never realised what lay behind the question.

With the fall of Aleppo on the 26th October 1918, the conclusion of the armistice with Turkey four days later, and the consequent withdrawal from the Mosul vilayet on the 8th November of the Turkish army in Mesopotamia, the whole area which had formed the subject of the correspondence with Sherif Hussein and of the Sykes-Picot Agreement passed into British military occupation. The war with Turkey was over, though peace was not to be concluded for some years, and the British and French Governments immediately announced, in what became known as the Anglo-French Declaration of November 1918, that their object in pursuing the war in the East was the complete and definite liberation of the peoples so long oppressed by the Turks, and the establishment of national governments and administrations drawing their authority from the initiative and free choice of the native populations. In order to give effect to these intentions, France and Great Britain were agreed to encourage and assist in the establishment of indigenous governments and administrations in Syria and Mesopotamia.

During the early months after the Armistice the same optimism was felt in London about the duration of the peace negotiations as had been felt in 1914 about the duration of the War. It never entered anyone's mind that to make peace with Turkey would take almost exactly as long as it had taken to fight her, and that so far as Mesopotamia was concerned no less than seven years would pass before final agreement had been reached. It was, however, realised that peace must first be made with Germany, and until this had been done the Allies must remain in military

occupation of the liberated territories of Turkey in Asia.

Meanwhile no time was lost in endeavouring to frame a policy for those territories which were likely to remain in the sphere of British influence as a result of the impending settlement. The Eastern Committee of the Cabinet, which was subsequently replaced by an Interdepartmental Conference on Middle Eastern Affairs, considered the whole question at a series of meetings held in the last months of 1918, and at one of these Lawrence gave his views on the future of the Arab countries, which included the creation of three Sherifian States, in Syria, Upper Mesopotamia, and Lower Mesopotamia respectively, under three of the sons of King Hussein of the Hejaz. This suggestion was telegraphed out to Colonel A. T. Wilson, who was now Acting Civil Commissioner in Mesopotamia, for his comments. These were given with characteristic downrightness, but they included a statement that an Arab State to include Basrah, Baghdad and Mosul, under an Arab Amir, would be regarded locally as an ideal solution for Mesopotamia. Also that a son of King Hussein would meet with widespread acceptance in Baghdad, and would probably be well received elsewhere, but that there were objections to the immediate appointment of an Arab Amir. In conclusion Colonel Wilson suggested the return of Sir Percy Cox as High Commissioner, with a Government of Arab ministers backed by British advisers. He had already expressed the view, in a series of trenchant comments on the Anglo-French declaration of 1918, that Mesopotamia as a whole neither expected nor desired any such sweeping scheme of independence as it foreshadowed, and

had recommended that the country should be declared a British Protectorate. British national characteristics and the trend of British policy in Mesopotamia during the past four years afforded the best guarantee that there, as in India, we should not fail to make every effort by the spread of education and institutions familiar to progressive States to encourage the growth of a self-contained Iraq State.

It can hardly be wondered at that Colonel Wilson was anxious not to jeopardise the administration which he was engaged in building up with all his unbounded energy. He had no doubt heard of the self-determination meeting that was held at Damascus as soon as the news of the Anglo-French declaration of November 1918 reached that city, when all the telegraph wires were cut, the tram service and electric-light installation put out of action by the cutting of the cables, and roughly 200,000 rounds of ball ammunition fired into the air. He was also undoubtedly right in pointing out from the first that it would be fatal to the future of Iraq to deprive her of the Mosul vilayet, and this is not the least of his claims to the grateful thanks of the Iraqi nation. What he failed to realise was that matters had already gone too far for any British administration, however benevolent, to secure for long the willing acceptance of the people of Mesopotamia.

On the 27th November Colonel Wilson's reply was considered by the Committee, and it was decided to instruct him to put three definite questions to the local population in Mesopotamia. Did they favour a single Arab State under British tutelage, stretching from the northern boundary of the Mosul vilayet to the Persian Gulf? If so, did they

consider that a titular Arab head should be placed over the new State? In that case, whom would they prefer as head? These enquiries were duly instituted but produced no conclusive reply.

When I joined the Foreign Office in January 1919 Mr. Balfour was Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, but during his prolonged absence at the Peace Conference in Paris Lord Curzon acted for him in London. Mr. Montagu, the Secretary of State for India, was still responsible for British policy in Mesopotamia, while Lord Curzon, as Acting Foreign Secretary, controlled the political activities of the British forces in Syria and Palestine. Administrative control in the two areas was exercised independently by the India Office and Foreign Office respectively, but general co-ordination was provided by the Interdepartmental Conference on Middle Eastern Affairs, a body which was presided over by Lord Curzon, and of which Mr. Montagu was a member. Force of circumstances made it inevitable that there should still be some divergence of view between the two departments concerned. The Foreign Office were gravely embarrassed by the fact that the British military authorities were acting as proxies for the French not only in Syria, but also in the Mosul vilayet. Conscious of their obligations both to the French and to the Arabs, His Majesty's Government had endeavoured to establish some form of Arab administration in the Mosul vilayet, which by the Sykes-Picot Agreement was to have been included in the French sphere, but the same causes which had prevented them from differentiating between Baghdad and Basrah in 1917 made it impossible for them to treat Mosul differently from the other two vilayets. A French

administration had, it was true, been set up by General Allenby in the coastal districts of Syria, and a French adviser was attached to the Arab administration in Damascus, but in both areas the actual control was British, and there was no immediate prospect of the French taking over. In the Mosul vilayet there was direct British administration, which exasperated the French Government and the Arab nationalists alike.

A fortnight after joining the Foreign Office I wrote a memorandum expressing my own views on the policy which should be adopted at the Peace Conference, in the light of my experiences during the War. In this paper I emphasised the essential unity of the Arab problem, and deplored the division of the Middle East between two mandatory Powers. I also gave it as my opinion that any indigenous Arab Government should have a titular head, and that no foreigner, however impartial, could fill the same place in the minds of the people as a representative of their own race. Only two days after this paper was written, a memorial from the Baghdadi officers in Feisal's army was received in the Foreign Office, which made it clear that they had welcomed the Anglo-French declaration as a sign that no part of Mesopotamia was to be under direct British rule, and I commented that when they returned to their homes they would be the first to cause difficulties if they thought we were not acting up to our pledges.

The appearance of these minutes led to my first interview with Lord Curzon, with whom my work in the Foreign Office during the next two years brought me into unusually close contact, as I was continually summoned to his room for consultation.

He was an indefatigable worker, and expected everyone else to be the same, even to the extent of having no fixed times for meals or sleep. A great deal of the Foreign Office work used to be sent over in boxes to his house in Carlton House Terrace, where he worked till all hours of the morning. It was always exciting to open these boxes when they came back next day, and to see what Lord Curzon had written upon the papers. He had only just taken over when I first joined the Foreign Office, and many of his comments were upon the way in which the files had been put up to him. "Please not this yellow slimy paper." "I have asked a score of times that the latest telegram should be on the top." "I am sitting in my own house at half-past two in the morning and am given no paper to write upon" (this was accompanied by an enormous minute written upon seven or eight sheets of private note-paper; the best-organised department in the world could not be expected to provide against such long excursions by the Secretary of State). "Has no one in the Foreign Office ever heard of *flags*? I am referred to page — of file — and have to wade through all the papers to find it. Please have all papers *flagged* in future." At other times such marginal notes as "I was not aware of it," "This is news to me," conveyed majestic reproof of incautious statements by his subordinates.

In conversation there was the same Olympian assumption of infinite distance. I remember being called in once to explain to the Director of Military Operations the reason why the Foreign Office had asked for some movement of troops across the Jordan. The General pointed out that they could not go farther than a certain line, as that would

bring them into the French zone. "Oh! but we are not advocating that," I cried, turning to Lord Curzon, "are we, sir?" "I certainly am not," he replied, "and I believe you agree with me."

Another time, I was in his room when he was reading over to Lord Hardinge, Sir John Tilley and myself the draft of a note which he proposed to send to the French Ambassador. It was half-past two, and none of us had lunched. When he had finished, he asked Lord Hardinge and Sir John Tilley whether they had any comment to offer, and seemed rather disappointed by their prompt disclaimer, which was probably due more to hunger than to anything else. Turning to me he said, "And Major Young? You are, I think, the most persistent critic of the poor policies I venture to put forward from time to time. May I ask how my latest effort strikes you?" "Well, sir," I said, "you rather muzzle me by asking me like that. I don't like to say anything." "Oh, but you entirely misapprehend my meaning, Major Young," he rejoined. "I value and welcome your criticism," and when I then made a suggestion, he readily adopted it.

I liked Lord Curzon, and got on very well with him, as I felt that his pompous manner was nothing more than a lifelong pose. I do not believe half of the malicious stories that are told about him, and am convinced that a great number of the authentic sayings were delivered half in fun to see whether the man he was talking to was really so foolish as to take him seriously. He wrote me a charming letter in his own hand when I left the Foreign Office, and I shall always remember it as a great privilege to have served under him.



In April 1919 Jones, who had been Secretary of the Interdepartmental Conference on Middle Eastern Affairs ever since his adventures on the Road to Endor, was recalled to Burma and I was asked to take his place. This meant a good deal of extra work, as the minutes were always expected to be ready within twenty-four hours of the meeting, and some of the discussions were enormously long. Lord Curzon always started the proceedings by a masterly survey, in which he reviewed in stately periods every development that had taken place since the last discussion of the subject. It was no easy job to take these speeches down in long-hand and reproduce them in a form which was acceptable to their author. The speeches of the other members did not matter so much, as I knew that they would not attach so much importance to the words in which they were reported, and in any case Lord Curzon always saw the draft before it was sent round and I could rely upon him to spot any serious mistake. At the meetings which dealt with the Arab countries, I sometimes had to give an opinion as well as to record those of other people, and while this made the meeting much more interesting it also added considerably to the difficulty of making a record.

The meeting at which I took over from Jones and had my first experience of writing minutes was attended by Colonel Wilson himself, and dealt with his proposals for setting up some form of constitution in Mesopotamia which should give the Arabs a share in conducting their own affairs. It was decided at this meeting to make a start by creating five provinces in Mesopotamia proper and an "Arab" province of Mosul fringed by autonomous Kurdish States, under Kurdish Chiefs advised by

British Political Officers. Provincial councils were to be set up, and the municipal and district councils which had been proposed by Colonel Wilson in the preceding November were to be developed and consolidated, but the Conference felt that the time was not yet ripe for the appointment of a High Commissioner and of provincial commissioners, which Colonel Wilson had recommended and I had advised as a first step.

At the beginning of May Colonel Wilson returned to Baghdad armed with authority to proceed on these lines. He passed through Damascus on his way, and took the opportunity of seeing two of the leaders of the Mesopotamian element in Feisal's Government, to whom he frankly admitted that the administration in Mesopotamia was not perfect, expressed his readiness to do what he could to meet their views, and explained his difficulty in finding suitable Arab personnel in Mesopotamia. They at once asked him whether he would agree to a representative being chosen from among them and sent to Baghdad to make suggestions, and he readily consented. I did not know this until later, when Nuri as Said, the present Prime Minister of Iraq, who was one of the officers concerned, told me about it in London, but I mention it now as it had an important bearing upon the future.

A month after Colonel Wilson's return to Baghdad, Feisal himself wrote to General Clayton, who was still Chief Political Officer of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force, a letter in which he suggested that the "severity" of the British authorities in Mesopotamia had begun, though only gradually, to turn away the affection of the people. He said that there was a general feeling that the time had

come for a change if the promises of the Anglo-French declaration were to be fulfilled. His Baghdadi officers, while well aware that it was not possible for Mesopotamia to stand alone for a considerable time, felt strongly the need of despatch in the constitution of a National Government, and perceived clearly that the longer it took to change the system the greater would be the difficulty in making the change. This letter was written in such excellent English that it did not read to me like a translation, and I thought that Lawrence had drafted it, while Lord Curzon, conscious of having gone into the whole question two months before, and of having approved what he felt to be the utmost degree of Arab self-government compatible with military occupation, thought that it savoured of impertinence. Feisal had not asked for any answer, and no action was taken on his letter, but on the 20th June a further despatch from General Clayton found its way to the Foreign Office in which he forwarded and supported a similar representation from the Baghdadi officers themselves, who demanded the immediate establishment of a National Government in Mesopotamia.

This time Lord Curzon agreed that some kind of answer was desirable, and a suggested reply was sent over to the India Office for Mr. Montagu's concurrence. Meanwhile Colonel Wilson had telegraphed on the 7th June that until the further status of the Mosul vilayet had been decided in principle it was difficult, if not impossible, for him to proceed with the measures of constitutional organisation which had been approved. He asked whether he might make an announcement about Mosul on the 21st June. This telegram reached

the Foreign Office officially on the 24th June, and was the first indication that the measures which had been approved in May were not progressing as fast as had been expected. Lord Curzon did not understand why the provisional creation of the provinces and the formation of the provincial councils, which had been sanctioned merely as a necessary step towards devolution, should be dependent upon the provinces themselves being permanently combined. The vilayet of Mosul lay within the French sphere of the Sykes-Picot Agreement, and although Mr. Lloyd George had already suggested that it should be transferred to the British sphere, no definite agreement had been reached with the French Government on the subject. To make any public announcement which anticipated this agreement was in Lord Curzon's view out of the question, and Colonel Wilson was told so on the 5th July.

The peace negotiations which culminated on the 28th June in the signature of the Treaty of Versailles had no immediate bearing upon the Middle East, except in one vital particular. The Covenant of the League of Nations, of which the final draft was approved on the 28th April, dealt among other questions with the disposal of territory detached from Germany and Turkey as a result of the War, and enshrined a new principle which came to be known as the mandatory system. Article 22 of the Covenant, which deals with mandates, contains the following provisions :

“To those colonies and territories which as a consequence of the late War have ceased to be under the sovereignty of the States which formerly governed them and which are inhabited by peoples not yet able to stand by themselves under the strenuous

conditions of the modern world, there should be applied the principle that the well-being and development of such peoples form a sacred trust of civilisation and that securities for the performance of this trust should be embodied in this Covenant.

“The best method of giving practical effect to this principle is that the tutelage of such peoples should be entrusted to advanced nations who by reason of their resources, their experience or their geographical position, can best undertake this responsibility, and who are willing to accept it, and that this tutelage should be exercised by them as Mandatories on behalf of the League.

“Certain communities formerly belonging to the Turkish Empire have reached a stage of development where their existence as independent nations can be provisionally recognised subject to the rendering of administrative advice and assistance by a Mandatory until such time as they are able to stand alone. The wishes of these communities must be a principal consideration in the selection of the Mandatory.

“In every case of mandate, the Mandatory shall render to the Council an annual report in reference to the territory committed to its charge.

“The degree of authority, control, or administration to be exercised by the Mandatory shall, if not previously agreed upon by the Members of the League, be explicitly defined in each case by the Council.

“A permanent Commission shall be constituted to receive and examine the annual reports of the Mandatories and to advise the Council on all matters relating to the observance of the mandates.”

These provisions should be contrasted with General Maude's announcement at the occupation

of Baghdad,<sup>1</sup> with President Wilson's Twelfth Point,<sup>2</sup> and with the British reply to the Syrian Covenanters,<sup>3</sup> if we are to judge fairly of the impression they created in the minds of thinking Arabs. The word "mandate," which was generally taken as a euphemism for "protectorate," very soon became anathema in Baghdad and Damascus, and this did not make matters easier either in London or in the Middle East itself. The mandatory idea was also thoroughly disliked and suspected by Feisal, who, with Lawrence in attendance, was in Paris as the representative of his father, Sherif Hussein. He was at that time naturally more interested in Syria than in Mesopotamia, but it was obvious that the two countries stood on the same footing.

The Foreign Office, who were impressed with the illogicality of the position, were naturally anxious that something should be done as soon as possible to satisfy the legitimate expectations both of the French and of the Arabs. Their object was to bring Feisal and the French together, so that the newly formed Arab administration in Syria could be transferred as soon as possible to the guidance of the Power whose interests in that part of the Middle East had been formally recognised in the Sykes-Picot Agreement. All attempts to effect this were, however, stultified by the fact that the French regarded Feisal as an instrument of British policy, and could not resist the suspicion that the immediate establishment of an Arab administration at Damascus was intended to make it difficult, if not impossible, for them to establish their influence in the Syrian hinterland. This suspicion was aggravated by the fact that there was no apparent indication

<sup>1</sup> Page 126.

<sup>2</sup> Page 276.

<sup>3</sup> Page 276.

that the British intended to set up any form of Arab administration in their own area on the Mesopotamian side. The Foreign Office could not understand why this should be impossible, or why it should be necessary to make matters worse by publicly assuming the transfer of the Mosul vilayet from the French to the British sphere before any step whatever could be taken to answer both French and Arab objections. The position was, in fact, that while Colonel Wilson was fighting for the unity of Iraq at the expense of Arab independence, Feisal and Lawrence were fighting for Arab independence at the expense of the unity of Syria. Wilson failed to realise the necessity for keeping faith with the Arabs as much as Lawrence under-estimated the necessity for keeping faith with the French. If only they had been working together, instead of against each other, the result might well have been that Syria and Iraq would have developed side by side along exactly the same lines, and entered the League of Nations hand-in-hand.

A certain piquancy was given to the situation in London by the personalities of the two Secretaries of State. Mr. Montagu's natural instincts were Liberal, and thus outraged by the policy of his subordinate in Mesopotamia, while Lord Curzon's were Imperial, and thus outraged by the policy which Lawrence and the Foreign Office advocated in that country. Each was thus placed in the position of having to support a policy with which he really disagreed. I myself had no illusions about Arab efficiency, but I was in full sympathy with Arab aspirations. I did not know, nor, I think, did anyone else, the precise "degree of control and authority" which was necessary for Mesopotamia,

but it was difficult to imagine a country being regarded as provisionally independent so long as it possessed no native authority in either the legislative, executive, or judicial spheres, and it seemed to me obvious that something ought to be done at once in the direction of creating these authorities in Mesopotamia. I had seen Arab Governors and military Commanders during my time in the Western theatre, a large percentage of whom were Mesopotamian by origin. I knew quite well that they represented only a minority, but the minority who are capable of exercising responsibility, however inefficiently from our point of view, can always sway the vast majority who are not, and I had seen enough of the majority at Basrah, Nasiriyah, Baghdad, and elsewhere, to realise how easily swayed they were, and how dangerous they could be if they were really roused.

The outcome of Colonel Wilson's conversation with the Baghdadis at Damascus was that Naji Beg Suwaidi (subsequently Prime Minister of Iraq) paid a visit to Baghdad, and was offered a post as Assistant to the Military Governor and Head of the Municipality. He accepted the post and resigned it almost immediately, some said because he wished to be free to sit on an international commission, others because he preferred to criticise from outside the machine. The real fact was that he had never contemplated entering the administration at all when he went to Baghdad. He and his friends in Damascus all thought that a National Government would be set up in Mesopotamia at some very early date, and he thought he was to advise how this should be done. When he found that he would be merely a unit in a British administration, and that



his schemes would receive at the hands of a British committee no more and no less consideration than those of any British officer, he decided that Baghdad was no place for him, and returned to Syria. His visit confirmed Colonel Wilson in his impatience of the criticism that was being levied at his administration by the men who claimed the right to govern themselves in their own way, and on the 19th July he telegraphed a vehement protest against the proposed reply to the demand of the Baghdadi officers for a National Government in Mesopotamia and strongly deprecated any pronouncement being drawn from His Majesty's Government by such small fry. Mr. Montagu concurred generally in his criticism of the actual terms of the suggested answer, but said that he shared Lord Curzon's opinion that it would be impolitic to ignore the repeated requests of the Baghdadi officers for a reassurance on the future policy of His Majesty's Government. He suggested that the line to be taken should be that, pending a decision by the Peace Conference as to who was to be the mandatory and what the nature of the mandate, it would be premature to attempt constitutional experiments; that His Majesty's Government had no desire to prejudice that decision; that the memorialists appeared to have been misinformed as to the progress of events in Mesopotamia; that if they visited the country they would find that certain steps, namely the formation of provincial and divisional councils, were already being taken to ensure such measure of Arab participation as was compatible with the military occupation of a region whose political future was still undetermined; and that the appointment of Naji Beg showed the desire of

His Majesty's Government to give Arabs of proved character and ability full scope for the exercise of their talents, even though Naji Beg had unfortunately resigned.

Lord Curzon adopted Mr. Montagu's draft, which was telegraphed to General Clayton for communication to the Baghdadi officers on the 9th August and repeated to Baghdad. A week later Colonel Wilson concluded a telegram in which he made a number of administrative and financial proposals—all of which Mr. Montagu and Lord Curzon agreed to be premature—with a sentence to the effect that if they were sanctioned they would enable him to carry on fairly satisfactorily for another twelve months or even more. He added that the constitutional proposals sanctioned on the 9th May would take at least a year to get into working order, and should meet local needs for many years to come.

On the 23rd August a Baghdad police report of the 7th July was received in the Foreign Office from the India Office. This stated that every Moslem Arab of education in Baghdad was a member of a society, with branches in all the important towns in Mesopotamia, which was described as simply a pan-Arab and anti-foreign organisation formed with a view to the expulsion of the British and the establishment of Arab rule. It was clear that events were moving very fast in the Middle East, and I warned Lord Curzon on the 23rd August that we should certainly have trouble in Mesopotamia if we were not very careful. Mr. Montagu was equally anxious, and suggested that an announcement should be made that in one form or another British support and effective assistance would be maintained in the country. Lord Curzon

referred this suggestion to the British delegation in Paris, who thought that such an announcement would be injudicious in view of the state of affairs at the Peace Conference. My own opinion was that it would in any case fail in its object unless it were coupled with some assurance that the support and assistance would be rendered to an Arab administration, but, in view of the answer from Paris, Lord Curzon decided to say nothing.

At this stage it was at last arranged that the Egyptian Expeditionary Force, which it had for some time been realised could not remain in occupation of Syria indefinitely, should evacuate the French sphere on the 1st November. The question then arose whether the hinterland from Damascus to Aleppo should be handed over to the French, in whose sphere of interest it lay by the Sykes-Picot Agreement, or to the Arabs, who were actually administering the government and who, by the same agreement, were to have an independent State there. The French, whose suspicion of Feisal was as strong as ever, could not very well shut their eyes to the fact that he was in possession, and had to agree that he should remain, though they did not like it, while Feisal, whose feelings towards them remained unaltered, was no better pleased at being handed over to their charge. Early in September Feisal himself came to London, accompanied by Colonel Cornwallis, who had been with him in Damascus ever since its occupation by the British and Arab forces nearly a year before, and by Nuri as Said. As soon as he arrived he was handed a copy of an *aide-mémoire* from Mr. Lloyd George to Monsieur Clemenceau in which the arrangements for the British evacuation of Syria were set out for

the concurrence of the French Government. Feisal was strongly recommended to come to terms with the French direct, but he hesitated to do so, and sent in a long appeal to the British Government not to abandon him. For over a month there were continual meetings and negotiations in Downing Street, and by the time he left England he realised that there was nothing for it but to enter into some agreement with the French Government. Lawrence was in London at the time, and wrote a long letter to Lord Curzon giving his views on what should be done, and recommending among other things that Feisal should be told what the British Government proposed to do in Mesopotamia. Lord Curzon disagreed with this, but suggested that opportunity should be taken of Feisal's presence in London to ask him whether there was any truth in a report which had just reached the Foreign Office that during July six well-known Sherifian officers had made a tour of the Mesopotamian tribes in disguise, obtaining signatures to anti-British manifestos. I had commented on this report that there was something very wrong somewhere, and that it seemed to me lamentable that the very officers with whom Lawrence, Joyce, and myself, among others, had lived in the closest possible touch, and who looked to the British Government as the mainstay of their revolt against the Turk, should be touring their own country in disguise.

When I questioned Nuri about this, he at once admitted that representatives had been sent to spy out the land, but he assured me most earnestly that they had been expressly enjoined to refrain from any kind of intrigue against the British administration. He mentioned the petition of the Bagh-

dadi officers in Damascus, and pronounced himself dissatisfied with the reply which had been sent to them. Naji Beg's appointment had been no answer at all to the aspirations set forth in the petition. What the Baghdadi officers wanted was an assurance that there was no intention of imposing permanently upon Mesopotamia the existing form of purely military administration. It was at this interview that Nuri told me of Colonel Wilson's conversation with him at Damascus, and said that the effect of Naji Beg's resignation had been to confirm in the minds of the Baghdadi officers the impression, which that conversation had largely dispelled, that the British military authorities in Mesopotamia regarded the Baghdadis in Syria as active enemies who were trying to undermine British influence in that country. The attitude of the British officials was more that of administrators of a foreign population who were incapable, and would always remain incapable, of governing themselves than that to which the Baghdadi officers had become accustomed on the other side, of friendly advisers who started on the assumption that the Arabs were managing their own affairs, and that it was not for them to do more than make friendly suggestions for the improvement of their plans.

Nuri knew nothing of the authority given by His Majesty's Government for the formation of the various councils, and said that so far as he was aware no such council had been formed except at Basrah, where there were no complaints. I told him of my own experiment in council-forming at Nasiriyah in 1916, and explained that the idea was to set up representative bodies of townsmen and tribesmen who would be able to give an authorita-

tive opinion when the time came for them to be consulted as to the form which the future government of the country should take. He said that he had no doubt whatever that if all his friends had been asked what they thought of such a plan they would have concurred in it, but that so far as he knew none of them had ever been consulted.

I came away from my interview with Nuri more than ever convinced that an immediate change was required in the spirit of our administration in Mesopotamia. I reported it fully to Lord Curzon and drew attention to a report which had just reached us that of the 233 officers employed only four were over forty-five years of age. I again recommended that three or four senior men of administrative experience should be sent to the country without delay under the orders of a chief with the experience and qualifications of Sir Percy Cox, and urged that at the same time a definite policy should be outlined to preclude the possibility of direct British administration being forced upon the country against the wishes of its inhabitants.

Lord Curzon was by now seriously alarmed. It was getting on for six months since the creation of the five provinces with their chain of councils had been authorised, and it appeared on enquiry from Baghdad that only four out of nine divisional councils had been formed, and that provincial councils had not been formed at all, nor did Colonel Wilson contemplate moving in the matter that year. He called a meeting of the Interdepartmental Conference, which sat on the 10th November and discussed the whole question at great length. All were agreed that the first condition of recovered confidence and future settlement was the return of

Sir Percy Cox to Mesopotamia, but this would be difficult until the mandate was given and he could act with undivided authority. It seemed unlikely that the mandate would be given before the New Year, but an early announcement of Sir Percy's return was desirable. In the end it was decided that Lord Curzon should himself telegraph privately to Sir Percy Cox at Teheran, suggesting his return to Mesopotamia and consulting him generally on the whole situation. At the same time the War Office and India Office were to call for reports on the progress that was being made in transferring military departments to the civil administration.

The British evacuation of Syria had meanwhile been carried out in accordance with Mr. Lloyd George's *aide-mémoire* to the French Government, and on the 19th November a report was received that a wild covenanter from Aleppo named Ramadhan al Shallash was on his way to Deir az Zor, on the Euphrates, which used to be the headquarters of a central independent *sanjaq* under the Turks, and did not properly belong either to Syria or to Mesopotamia. Here local tribesmen, under Ramadhan's leadership, attacked a British outpost and held the garrison as hostages. Feisal, who was at that time in Paris in connection with the negotiations for the evacuation of Syria, disclaimed all connection with the incident and gave immediate orders restraining his excited followers, but the incident led to the withdrawal of the British detachment and the incorporation of Deir az Zor into the zone under Arab administration. This did not, of course, popularise the Arab Government of Damascus with the British authorities in Mesopotamia, who suspected Feisal of encouraging the Arab

nationalists to cause trouble to the British as well as to the French. Nor would it have been surprising if he had in fact done so, though His Majesty's Government were satisfied that he personally had had no hand in the disturbance. Whether the same can truthfully be said of those who were in charge of the administration at Damascus and Aleppo in his absence is another matter, into which it would be profitless to enquire. The fact remains that the Deir az Zor incident widened beyond all hope of repair the already yawning gulf between the Wilsonian and the Lawrentian schools of thought, and led inevitably to the final catastrophe.



## CHAPTER XII

### DELAYS (CONFERENCES, 1920)

Colonel Wilson's despatch. Delays. Congresses in Damascus. Answering the French Ambassador. Nuri as Said. Tardy conversion. The Baghdad Committee. Lord Curzon and Mr. Montagu. Announcements. Constitutional proposals. British or Arab control. Colonel Wilson's telegram. Announcement of return of Sir Percy Cox. French occupation of Damascus. Rebellion in Mesopotamia.

LORD CURZON was in Paris all through the month of January 1920, and it was difficult to get any decisions taken about Mesopotamia. Sir Percy Cox was not prepared to return to the country except as High Commissioner and with supreme authority, but the War Office took the view that military administration must continue until the mandate was settled and peace with Turkey ratified. In any case, Sir Percy could not be expected to go straight to Baghdad from Teheran, and must come home first for a holiday, so that he could hardly take over until the autumn.

This was to me an alarming prospect, and my alarm was deepened with the receipt in the Foreign Office on the 23rd January of a despatch from Colonel Wilson, dated the 15th November 1919, forwarding a long note by Miss Gertrude Bell on Syria in October 1919. Miss Bell ended her note with an apt forecast of the future. "When we set up civil administration in this country," she wrote, "the fact that a responsible native Government existed for a year in Syria will not be forgotten by Mesopotamian Nationalists; and if we seek to make

use of those Iraqis who have done best in Syria they will claim great liberty of action, and they will expect to be treated as equals. . . . Local conditions, the vast potential wealth of the country, the tribal character of its rural population, the lack of material from which to draw official personnel will make the problem harder to solve here than elsewhere. I venture to think that the answer to such objections is that any alternative line of action would create problems the solution of which we are learning to be harder still."

Colonel Wilson's covering despatch contained the following passages :

"The fundamental assumption throughout this note . . . is that an Arab State in Mesopotamia and elsewhere within a short period of years is a possibility, and that the recognition or creation of a logical scheme of government on these lines, in supersession of those on which we are now working in Mesopotamia, would be practicable and popular. . . . My observations in this country and elsewhere have forced me to the conclusion that this assumption is erroneous, . . . and I venture probably for the last time in my present capacity to lay before His Majesty's Government the considerations which have led me to this conclusion. . . . I believe it to be impossible in these days to create a new sovereign Muhammadan State by diplomatic or administrative means out of the remnants of the Turkish Empire. . . . If an Arab Government were constituted by decree of the League of Nations or by other extraneous authority, and maintained for a period by our arms and our money, it is my belief that the Arab public at large would after a very few years actively favour the return of the Turks to the continuance of an amateur Arab Government. . . .

at present, in close touch with the leading people and retained its ability to act quickly in legislative and administrative matters. I did not share his belief in the efficacy of good administration to silence political opposition in Mesopotamia, and still thought that he was under-estimating the influence of the absentee Baghdadis who really "counted" far more than anyone who was in Baghdad itself at the time.

Mr. Montagu sent Colonel Wilson's despatch of the 15th November to the Foreign Office with no other comment than the suggestion that it should be laid before the Interdepartmental Conference in connection with the proposal for the return of Sir Percy Cox to Baghdad. He said that he would be glad to learn what progress was being made with this proposal. But the Conference of Ambassadors which had assembled on the 26th January to draft a treaty of peace with Turkey was in almost daily session, and it was impossible to arrange for a meeting of the Interdepartmental Conference. The papers were all retained by Lord Curzon and did not appear again in the office until April.

The next development of importance took place on the other side of the theatre, where Feisal was finding it increasingly difficult to control the exuberant nationalism of his followers. On the 8th March it was reported that he found himself forced to convoke a Syrian Congress, which proposed to declare the complete independence of Syria and to crown him King. The British and French Governments immediately concerted a warning telegram which was despatched to him on the same day, strongly advising him to refrain from any action which might prejudice the decisions of the Peace

Conference, and inviting him to attend their discussions. This failed in its object, and on the 11th March the Congress was held and proclaimed Feisal King of Syria and Palestine, while a second body, composed of Mesopotamian officers of Feisal's army, proclaimed his brother Abdullah King of Iraq.

This effort to stampede the Allied Powers was probably inspired by the example of D'Annunzio in Fiume, and was very naturally resented both by the British and by the French. When the news reached London the French Ambassador immediately asked for an interview with Lord Curzon, in order to concert a common policy between the British and French Governments. There was to be a meeting of the Conference of Ambassadors in Lord Curzon's room that afternoon, and he said that he would see the French Ambassador immediately after it. I was in attendance at the meeting, and when tea was brought in after the discussion I reminded Lord Curzon of his promise. "But I don't know what to say to him," he replied. "Come out with me and let us discuss it quietly." He led me into the tiny cloak-room next door to his room and we started an animated discussion among the hats and coats of the assembled diplomats. I wanted repudiation of the Damascus proceedings to be coupled with some kind of encouraging message, but Lord Curzon did not agree, and we were still arguing when one of the secretaries put his head in and tried to say something. Lord Curzon was very much annoyed at the interruption, but when he found that his choice of a meeting-place was preventing the members of the Conference from getting their hats he sailed down the corridor into his

private secretary's room, with me following in his wake, and we set to again. After a few minutes the secretary again put in his head and was nearly blown through the roof. "Cannot I be left undisturbed for one moment?" cried the Secretary of State. "I am discussing a most important question." "I am very sorry, sir," said the secretary, "but the French Ambassador is still waiting in your room and wants to know if he is to stay or go away." Lord Curzon turned to me impatiently and said, "You are the man who is preventing me from seeing the Ambassador. Why do you not let me say what I want to say?" "Because I think you are wrong, sir," I said. "And I think you are wrong," he replied. "Well, I must go and see him, and say something," and he sailed away. In the end a joint message was sent repudiating the action of the two Congresses, and renewing the invitation to Feisal to come to Europe. This he declined to do unless his kingship were recognised, as we learnt from Nuri, who left Damascus for London three days before the Congress actually met.

At the request of the India Office I took the opportunity of Nuri's presence in London to question him about the action of the Mesopotamian covenanters in Damascus. He told me that soon after the Armistice, Turkish propaganda and accusations against the British had influenced a small section of the people and had alienated their sympathies, thus giving some of the British officials on the spot the wrong impression that there was a strong responsible party in the Arab countries who wanted to reinstate the Turks. He himself very much regretted that a national civil administration under the supervision of the British military

authorities had not been set up when he had first recommended it through General Allenby's Political officers at the end of 1918, and that matters had been allowed to drift. He assured me that the majority of the members of the Mesopotamian Congress consisted of those who had fought by the side of the British against the common enemy, and that they were as strongly opposed to the continuance of misunderstandings between the people of Iraq and their allies as they were to the resumption of any understanding or co-operation with the Turks. What had happened was that the notables of Baghdad and Mosul, by power of attorney, and a considerable number of tribal chiefs by letter, had authorised six persons at Damascus to act in their name. These six were Feisal himself, Ja'far Pasha, Naji Beg Suwaidi, Maulud Pasha Mukhlis, Yasin al Hashimi, and my old friend of the Deraa flying column Ali Jaudat Beg. It is interesting to see now that this list contains not only the name of the future King, but also those of three future Prime Ministers, and of a future Finance Minister of Iraq, which shows that the Mesopotamian Congress was by no means a negligible body. At the same time it was of course in no sense representative, and it is not surprising that the British Government repudiated its action.

The effect upon Colonel Wilson of the proceedings in Damascus, and of a reaffirmation of the Anglo-French declaration by Mr. Lloyd George in the House of Commons on the 23rd February, was that he at last realised that the views expressed in his despatch of the 15th November were not only unacceptable to the British Government, but also untenable. Resolutely determined to exclude She-

rifian influence from Mesopotamia, in the honest belief that it would result in the destruction of all his administrative work and the consequent ruin of the country, he set about preparing a counterblast to any announcement that might be issued about Mesopotamia from Sherifian sources. With this object he appointed a Committee under the presidency of Sir Edgar Bonham-Carter with instructions to work out a constitution for Iraq, in accordance with the declared policy of His Majesty's Government, and in a series of telegrams despatched on the 19th, 20th, and 21st March announced what Mr. Montagu afterwards described as his tardy conversion to the idea of an Arab Government.

As was nearly always the case when telegrams of this importance reached London, I discussed the new situation fully on the 26th March with Mr. (now Sir John) Shuckburgh, who was at that time dealing with Mesopotamian questions in the India Office, and under whom I was subsequently to work for nearly six years in the Colonial Office. Mr. Montagu had suggested that an immediate announcement should be made of the intention of His Majesty's Government to set up a National Government in an Arab State in Iraq, and we discussed its terms. We came to the conclusion that we must not appear to have our hands forced, and that any new departure must be explained as the logical issue of our administrative measures up to date. We saw no harm in the Baghdad committee, but agreed that it was undesirable for us to appear to be imposing a constitution on the people of Mesopotamia. At the same time we felt that no specific local enquiries should be made on the questions of British versus Arab control or of an Arab

Amir. The committee should in our opinion work out one or two alternatives in consultation with representative Mesopotamians and submit them to the local councils as suggestions. The proposed announcement would explain that all our measures had been directed towards the formation of bodies of a representative character who could be consulted when the time came. That time had now arrived and we were ready to help the councils, but had no intention of dictating to them. In point of fact there seemed to us to be little likelihood of the Councils evolving anything which would compete with the Committee's proposals, provided that these were on liberal lines.

We reported the result of our discussion to our respective Secretaries of State, and the question was discussed by the Interdepartmental Conference on the 13th April, the decision being that Lord Curzon and Mr. Montagu should concert an announcement for immediate publication in Mesopotamia. Colonel Wilson was told the same evening that a reply would shortly reach him, and replied begging that orders might be deferred until he had again reported, which he would do on the 27th April. Meanwhile Lord Curzon and Mr. Montagu tried to arrive at an agreed draft announcement, the point of difference being that Mr. Montagu wished to say that a representative National Government was to be created, while Lord Curzon hesitated to commit himself quite so far. Thus, the peculiar process to which I have already referred, by which Lord Curzon was unconsciously changing his Imperial skin and Mr. Montagu his Liberal spots, was for once reversed, and each came out in his true colours.

While the discussion was still proceeding, Lord



Curzon again left London, this time for San Remo, where the mandatory principle foreshadowed in the Covenant of the League of Nations was definitely confirmed, the mandates for Mesopotamia and Palestine were entrusted to Great Britain, and the mandate for Syria to France. In the course of the negotiations which led to these decisions the proposal that Palestine should be international, which depended on Russian co-operation, was finally abandoned, and the French were also induced to withdraw their claims to the Mosul vilayet, which was finally included in Mesopotamia under British mandate.

On the 27th April Colonel Wilson telegraphed a full summary of the report of the Baghdad committee, and asked leave to make an announcement on the lines of their recommendations at the earliest possible moment. Meanwhile agreement had been reached between the two Secretaries of State as to the terms of the announcement which they had been engaged in drafting. It was accordingly telegraphed out to Baghdad on the 4th May, but on the day before it was despatched Colonel Wilson, having just heard the news of the granting of the mandate, decided to publish a *communiqué* of his own which merely held out the hope that the establishment of civil administration would give an ever-widening field to native energies. The announcement telegraphed out on the 4th May had gone much farther than this. It reaffirmed the intention of His Majesty's Government to promote the creation in Iraq of a form of civil administration based upon representative indigenous institutions, which would prepare the way for the creation of an independent Arab State of Iraq : and it announced

that the Civil Commissioner had been directed to take immediate measures, in consultation with the Councils and with the approval of local opinion in all parts of the country, to frame definite proposals with this object. In telegraphing it out to Baghdad Mr. Montagu had acknowledged the summary of the Baghdad committee report and had promised to send further instructions as soon as it had been considered. This showed clearly that he regarded the policy outlined in his own announcement as definitely decided upon, and that he wished it to be published, notwithstanding the fact that it did not entirely accord with the recommendations of the Baghdad committee.

Colonel Wilson, on the other hand, appeared reluctant to publish anything which would preclude him from proceeding on the lines of the committee's report. He telegraphed on the 8th May that the first portion of Mr. Montagu's announcement had been anticipated by his own *communiqué*. The fact that His Majesty's Government intended to institute a National Government in Mesopotamia had moreover been telegraphed to every town in the country by Nuri as Said. The second portion of the announcement apparently committed him to further specific consultation and discussion with the people of the country. This could have but one result, namely the winning over of the Moderates during the coming month of Ramadhan by the Extremist party, who were demanding absolute independence. If during the next seven days he could announce that His Majesty's Government provisionally approved his own proposals, there were grounds for hoping that he would be able to count on the support of a strong

block of Moderate opinion, and he would then be in a position to deal with the Extremists. An announcement that Sir Percy Cox would shortly return as High Commissioner would also be of great value. He concluded by pointing out that as a Staff officer to the General Officer Commanding he was responsible to him that no action should be taken which would imperil his forces and lines of communication and the numerous women and children in the country.

In a later telegram, which reached the Foreign Office on the 15th May, he said that an announcement of the constitution he proposed for the country was unlikely to have any appreciable effect on pan-Arab agitation. The situation was dangerous, and further concession in a constitutional direction would not affect the issue.

On the afternoon of the 17th May the Inter-departmental Conference again met to consider the position. The proposals of the Baghdad Committee had meanwhile been scrutinised both in the Foreign Office and India Office. They provided for a representative assembly under the control of a predominantly British Council of State, of which the Arab members were to be appointed by the High Commissioner. This was neither an Arab Government nor did it seem to me likely to become one. I had always held the view that the constitution should be worked out on lines which would eventually develop into an indigenous Government, and felt that the British Government could control and direct by virtue of their position as advising and protecting Power just as effectively as they could by assuming direct executive functions. The Conference took the same view, Lord Curzon pointing

out that the proposed constitution was not an Arab Government inspired and helped by British advice, but a British Government infused with Arab elements to a gradually increasing extent, and Mr. Montagu going even farther and suggesting, as I had myself done a month and a half earlier, that the mandate should be exercised in the form of a treaty with the people of the country rather than by the drawing up of a mandate document. The difficulty was that there was already in existence a draft identical mandate for Syria and Mesopotamia which had been drawn up in consultation with Dr. Hogarth, Miss Bell, and Colonel Lawrence, and in the terms of which Colonel Wilson had concurred. The Conference decided to go through this document in the light of recent developments, and meanwhile to acquiesce in no further steps being taken towards the publication of the announcement to which the Civil Commissioner had offered such strong objection.

This decision was communicated to Colonel Wilson by telegraph on the 20th May, and on the 26th a further meeting was held solely for the purpose of examining the draft mandate. This examination was completed at a second meeting held on the 1st June, at which the Conference also discussed a proposal made by Mr. Montagu that an immediate announcement should be made of the return of Sir Percy Cox as High Commissioner, combined with the setting up of a provisional Government on the lines of the Baghdad committee's report, but with modifications in the direction of enhanced Arab participation. After a long discussion it was decided that only Sir Percy Cox, who was expected to leave Teheran in a few days' time, could inaugurate

the new régime, and that it was necessary that he should be consulted as to the constitution of the bodies which it would be his task to control.

While the telegram in which this decision was to be communicated to Baghdad was being drafted, reports were received which showed that matters were moving even faster than had been anticipated. On the 2nd June the Civil Commissioner received a deputation of Baghdadi Extremists, who had asked for an opportunity of expressing their views, and made them a speech in the course of which he announced that His Majesty's Government desired to set up a National Government in Iraq, and that it was their intention that this should be done as soon as possible. He then explained the gist of his own constitutional proposals, and pointed out that with the best will in the world an indigenous National Government could not be set up at once. The deputation were not satisfied with these assurances, and demanded the immediate formation of a Convention for Iraq, elected in conformity with the Turkish electoral law, which should be empowered to draw up proposals for a National Government as promised in the Anglo-French Declaration of November 1918.

In reporting these proceedings on the same day, the Civil Commissioner expressed the opinion that if he had been authorised to make before the beginning of Ramadhan the announcement for which he had asked authority in his telegram of the 8th May, the movement would not have reached its present uncompromising form. Matters had now reached a pitch where he saw no other course open but to announce that when the mandate was granted steps would be taken to summon a Con-

stituent Assembly to consult on the future form of Government. He suggested that Sir Percy Cox should spend a few days in Baghdad on his journey home from Teheran. On the 7th June Mr. Montagu telegraphed authority to announce the impending return of Sir Percy Cox to inaugurate the new régime, adding rather surprisingly that subject to reservations on points of detail the Civil Commissioner's recommendations were accepted in principle as furnishing a generally suitable basis on which to construct provisional institutions such as were postulated by the mandate. I do not know what was at the back of his mind when he sent this telegram, which gave the impression that His Majesty's Government had at last approved proposals which had been before them since the 27th April, subject only to unimportant reservations. The real fact, as I have tried to show, was that the proposals themselves had been finally turned down on what could scarcely be described as a point of detail, namely the vital question of principle whether the Council of State should be predominantly British, as Colonel Wilson recommended, predominantly Arab, as Mr. Montagu suggested, or wholly Arab, as we thought in the Foreign Office.

Hardly had this telegram been despatched when another series of three telegrams was received from Colonel Wilson on the 10th and 11th June. In one of these he said that the situation in Baghdad had somewhat improved, that Moderate opinion condemned the Extremists, and that the public felt itself to be misled. The position in Mosul and Basrah was satisfactory. It did not now seem necessary for Sir Percy Cox to consult local opinion, and, if he agreed, he proposed to arrange for him

to pass through Mesopotamia incognito to Basrah. The second said that the announcement of the impending return of Sir Percy Cox would be made on about the 18th June, at the end of the month of Ramadhan. It would doubtless evoke lively protests from the Extremists who would demand complete independence, and further demonstrations might be engineered. To meet this possibility, Colonel Wilson suggested the despatch of a deputation of not more than eight Iraqis to England to lay their views before Mr. Montagu. This was as far as he thought we should go in the direction of conciliation, and he would then feel himself strong enough to take drastic action against the irreconcilables.

The third telegram was more sensational. It attributed the present position principally to the reduction of the garrison and the withdrawal of experienced officers and their absence on leave, and contained the following passages :

“ Whilst acting in accordance with the spirit, and so far as may be with the letter of the mandate, we cannot maintain our position as mandatory by a policy of conciliation of extremists. Having set our hand to the task of regenerating the internal Government, we must be prepared to furnish alike men and money and to maintain continuity of control for years to come. We must be prepared, regardless of the League of Nations, to go very slowly with constitutional or democratic institutions, the application of which to Eastern countries has been attempted of late years with such little degree of success. If His Majesty's Government regard such a policy as impracticable or beyond our strength (as well they may) I submit that they would do better to face the alternative, formidable and, from the local point of view, terrible as it is, and evacuate Mesopotamia.”

This telegram, which I regarded as tantamount to a resignation, and thought should be accepted as such, was discussed by the Interdepartmental Conference on the 16th June. It was to me unthinkable that we should evacuate Mesopotamia within two months of having accepted the mandate; and I could not believe that the only alternative was to proceed regardless of the League of Nations, to whom an account of our stewardship would have to be rendered. Lord Curzon took the same view. Colonel Wilson was a man whom he could not help admiring, but it was obvious that he could not bring himself to carry out the policy which the Conference had consistently advocated. He had said that we must either hold Mesopotamia by force or clear out. Lord Curzon's own opinion was that we should continue to hold the middle course of retaining our position in the country with the goodwill of the people, and this was agreed, subject to a Cabinet decision which was to be taken on the following day. After the Cabinet meeting the text of an announcement to be made in Baghdad was telegraphed to Colonel Wilson, and Sir Percy Cox, who had arrived in that city from Teheran on the 18th June, was asked to come home with the least possible delay. The announcement in the form in which it was published in Baghdad read as follows :

“His Majesty's Government having been entrusted with the Mandate for Iraq anticipate that the Mandate will constitute Iraq an independent State under guarantee of the League of Nations and subject to the Mandate of Great Britain, that it will lay on them the responsibility for the maintenance of internal peace and external security, and will



require them to formulate an Organic Law to be framed in consultation with the people of Iraq and with due regard to the rights, wishes, and interests of all the communities of the country. The Mandate will contain provisions to facilitate the development of Iraq as a self-governing State until such time as it can stand by itself, when the Mandate will come to an end.

"The inception of this task His Majesty's Government have decided to entrust to Sir Percy Cox, who will accordingly return to Baghdad in the autumn, and will resume his position on the termination of the existing Military Administration as Chief British Representative in Iraq.

"Sir Percy Cox will be authorised to call into being, as provisional bodies, a Council of State under an Arab President and a General Elective Assembly representative of and freely elected by the population of Iraq. And it will be his duty to prepare, in consultation with the General Elective Assembly, the permanent Organic Law."

The setting up of a provisional Arab Government was thus postponed until the autumn, and the germs of Sherifian nationalist propaganda continued to thrive in the carefully prepared gelatine of direct British administration. At the beginning of July the tribes on the Euphrates rose in rebellion against the British authorities, and for the next five months Mesopotamia was the scene of a series of outbreaks which necessitated the despatch of large reinforcements from India.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the theatre, the granting of the Syrian mandate to France at San Remo had removed the last excuse for interference by His Majesty's Government between the French Government and Feisal. In spite of all

efforts to bring the two into agreement the latent hostility which was perhaps inevitable in the circumstances burst into flame : Damascus was occupied by French troops on the 25th July, and after an ineffective armed resistance Feisal was forced to flee the country. When the clash actually came in Syria, and Feisal was on the point of being driven out, certain Members of Parliament, who knew Lawrence and supported his policy, were very much perturbed, and a question was put down which caused some alarm in Downing Street. On the morning of the day on which it was to be answered, someone telephoned to say that Mr. Bonar Law would like a representative to come over from the Foreign Office and advise on the line the Government should take if the question were raised on the adjournment, which seemed more than likely. I was told that I had better go over and explain as well as I could, and was just preparing to do so when I got another message to say that Mr. Lloyd George himself was proposing to answer the question, and that I must wait until he arrived in London that evening.

When I went over I found him and Mr. Bonar Law sitting in the Prime Minister's room at No. 10, and was invited to express my views on the recent developments in Syria. My own feeling was that matters should not have come to a head, and that the French authorities might by liberal and sympathetic treatment have so arranged matters that Feisal could have retained his position, and I said so. Mr. Lloyd George, however, did not feel that it was for him to criticise the action of the French authorities now that they were solely responsible for Syria, and told me to make out as strong a case

as I could for them. I had been a temporary Civil Servant long enough to know that it was my duty to put forward whatever case was wanted, and I therefore changed my line and put forward as many arguments as I could in favour of what the French had done. A little later the conversation turned to Mesopotamia, and I expressed the fear that the reaction in that country would be disastrous, and that we should have considerable trouble in restoring order, as we had not taken any steps to pacify national feeling. I also allowed myself to return to the line of argument which I had originally adopted about Syria.

On this Mr. Bonar Law looked up and remarked, "But I thought you said just now, Mr. Young, that the French were perfectly justified in what they have done at Damascus." "I know I did," I said, "but that was when the Prime Minister told me to put the case for them." Mr. Lloyd George laughed and said, "Quite true, he was only putting a case. His heart was not in it. We must go down to the House now and see whether Lord Curzon agrees with what Mr. Young has suggested." We bundled into a car and drove down to the House of Lords, where Lord Curzon was busy with the debate on the Dyer case. He came out to his room, and the three of them then began discussing the question, while I retired to the background.

Lord Curzon seemed to approve generally of the suggested line of defence, and Mr. Lloyd George then said, "Well, Bonar, I think you have a very good case. It doesn't seem necessary for me to take the answer. I think I had better leave it to you"; to which Mr. Bonar Law replied, "But is that exactly according to precedent, Mr. Prime Minister?"

opposing views as to the composition of the provisional Council of State, which had its origin in the fundamental divergence between the Wilsonian and Lawrentian theories of the policy which should be adopted towards the Arab peoples. The untempered application of these theories had led, the first in Mesopotamia and the second in Syria, to armed conflict between the Arabs and the mandatory Power concerned. It remained to be seen whether the lesson had been learnt, and whether it was possible to evolve a mandatory relation which should combine the merits of the two rival systems and at the same time be free from their respective political and administrative defects.

## *EPILOGUE*

### CHAPTER XIII

#### CONSTRUCTION (MIDDLE EAST, 1921)

Formation of the Middle East Department of the Colonial Office. Mr. Winston Churchill. The Cairo Conference. Decision that the Iraq Mandate should be expressed in treaty form. King Feisal. Discussions at Alexandria. By air to Jerusalem and Baghdad. Accidents. Position of High Commissioner in Iraq, and of British officials. Conclusion.

ONE effect of recent events in Mesopotamia and elsewhere in the Middle East had been to lead His Majesty's Government to the conclusion that the system of divided control between the Foreign Office, India Office, and War Office must be brought to an end, and the responsibility transferred to a single Department under the control of one Secretary of State. The choice fell upon the Colonial Office, and a committee was appointed under the chairmanship of the Secretary to the Ministry of Labour, with instructions to report to the Secretary of State for War and Air how this transfer might best be accomplished. The Secretary of State for War and Air was at that time Mr. Winston Churchill and the Secretary to the Ministry of Labour was Sir James Masterton Smith, who had been Private Secretary at the Admiralty for many years, including those during which Mr. Churchill had been First Lord. I was appointed from the Foreign Office to sit on the Committee, and soon realised that the intention of the Prime Minister was

that Mr. Churchill should go to the Colonial Office, with Sir James Masterton Smith as Permanent Under-Secretary. This suspicion was confirmed when I was sent for by Mr. Churchill and offered the post of Assistant Secretary in the new Middle East Department of the Colonial Office. He greeted me kindly, and poured out his ideas on the policy that he thought should henceforth be pursued in Mesopotamia. I must have allowed myself to look critical, for he suddenly paused and remarked that I did not appear to think much of his ideas. I hastily disclaimed any critical intention, but ventured to suggest that the subject was highly complicated. "I know," said he. "There is a great deal to learn, but at least I have a completely virgin mind on the subject." I asked if I might violate it, and was still doing so when he had to go to some other engagement, but he very kindly asked me to continue the process at dinner at his Club the following night. We had not got very far with the meal when he suddenly asked me what I should do in Mesopotamia if I were omnipotent. I asked him in return to tell me whether he was prepared to defend Mesopotamia from hostile attack. On his replying that he supposed we should have to hang on to Baghdad, I explained that this was not what I meant, and asked if he was prepared to defend all the land frontiers of Mesopotamia, if necessary with the whole weight of the British Empire, if the Turks or anyone else attacked us. He protested that he could not be expected to answer a question like that over the dinner-table, to which I rejoined that until an answer had been found to my own question I was afraid I could not answer his.

The new Department came into existence on the

14th February 1921, Sir John Shuckburgh being appointed Assistant Under-Secretary, Mr. Roland Vernon and myself joint Assistant Secretaries, and Bullard from Mesopotamia, Forbes Adam from the Foreign Office, and Howard from the War Office principal officers. Colonel Lawrence was attached as political adviser, and Colonel Meinertzhagen, who had succeeded Sir Gilbert Clayton as Chief Political Officer to Lord Allenby, was put in charge of the military side, while a number of junior officers from the Colonial Office, of whom Hathorn Hall has alone remained to the end, were also posted to the Department. Every possible point of view was thus represented, and Mr. Churchill could be satisfied that no question would arise upon which experienced advice was not forthcoming. His first step was to thrash the whole problem out at a conference in Cairo which was attended by all the principal Political and military officers from the territories with which the newly formed Department was to deal. Lawrence and I went to Cairo with him, and the War Office and Air Ministry were represented by General Radcliffe and Air-Marshal Trenchard.

Mr. Churchill's main object was to reduce Imperial expenditure in the Middle East, while at the same time initiating a policy which would enable His Majesty's Government to fulfil their undertakings and responsibilities in that part of the world. Between the 12th and the 24th March the conference was in continuous session, and I was kept very busy as general secretary and also private secretary to Mr. Churchill during the illness of Sir Archibald Sinclair. So far as Iraq was concerned it was decided that the only way by which British

expenditure could be reduced consistently with retaining the mandate was to set the relations between ourselves and the people of Iraq upon a treaty footing. This would enable Air Force control to be established, and would bring down the cost of the garrison in three or four years from thirty-five millions to less than five. Mr. Churchill had already made up his mind that Feisal would be the best person with whom to make a treaty. Nearly a year had passed since his conflict with the French at Damascus, and in the interval he had again been to London, not in connection with Iraq, though there had of course been private conversations with him on the possibility of his going there, but as representative of his father King Hussein, with whom the Foreign Office were negotiating about affairs in the Hejaz. Sir Percy Cox threw himself whole-heartedly into the new policy, which was approved by His Majesty's Government on Mr. Churchill's return from Cairo, and Feisal was informed that there would be no objection to his visiting Iraq and offering himself as a candidate for the throne, on the understanding that if he were crowned King of Iraq he would, by treaty, enable His Majesty's Government to fulfil their mandatory responsibilities. He arrived in Iraq in June 1921, and his personal charm and ability, coupled no doubt with the fact that he had the coupon, resulted in his being almost unanimously accepted by the people as their future ruler. He was crowned King of Iraq on the 23rd August, with the formal recognition of His Majesty's Government, and on the 10th September he formed the first Council of Ministers, which assumed the duties of the provisional Council of State.



In the following November Mr. Churchill decided to send Vernon and myself to Baghdad with material to help Sir Percy Cox to negotiate the treaty by which it had been decided to regulate our relations with Iraq. The idea underlying the proposed treaty was that it should enable His Majesty's Government to fulfil the obligations of a mandatory Power, which had already been formulated in the draft identical mandate for Syria and Mesopotamia, and that it should be accepted by the League of Nations as equivalent to a mandate document. King Feisal and the Iraqis could thus maintain that they knew nothing of a "mandate" and that they were merely in treaty relations with Great Britain, while the League would hold Great Britain responsible for the observance of the mandate by means of the treaty. The "provisional independence" contemplated in Article XXII of the Covenant would, in fact, be translated into "independence subject to the observance of an approved treaty with the mandatory Power."

The actual drafting of the treaty seemed to me to present a straightforward though delicate problem. All that had to be done was to secure King Feisal's acceptance of the specific obligations laid upon His Majesty's Government by the League of Nations, and to embody provisions in the treaty by which he undertook that he would himself carry them out. For example, the draft mandate provided for the enactment of an Organic Law which gave equal rights to all Iraqis and in other respects conformed to the principles of enlightened government. In this case all that was necessary was for the treaty to contain an article by which His Majesty King Feisal undertook that such an Organic Law would

be framed and enacted. The difficulty was to evolve a system by which not only the Organic Law but all other laws would, in fact, be adhered to. What control would the High Commissioner be able to exercise? What should be his relations with the British officials of the administration? What was to happen if an Iraqi minister gave an order which, if carried out, would give rise to legitimate criticism at Geneva? How was the High Commissioner to know that this was going to happen, and how could he stop it?

These and other questions could not be answered in London, and it struck me that Egyptian experience would probably be helpful. Sir Gilbert Clayton was now Adviser to the Interior in Egypt, and I discussed the whole question with him and Sir Maurice Amos and Mr. Scott at Alexandria when we passed through. I came away from the discussion with the impression that some of our difficulties in Egypt had been caused by the fact that in the early days of the administration the British officers in the service of the Egyptian Government had been serving two masters, without any clear definition having been made of their respective duty to each. Lord Cromer and his successors had been in some respects Governors of Egypt as well as Diplomatic representatives of His Majesty's Government, inasmuch as they had been in a position, through the British officers, to issue what were in effect executive orders. It seemed to me that the inevitable effect of a similar lack of definition of the duties of the British officers in Iraq would be that it would become impossible for us ever to dissociate ourselves from the actual administration of the country. What I was anxious at

all costs to avoid was a situation which would lead at some future date to the necessity of a Montagu-Chelmsford scheme or a Milner report, with consequent dislocation of the system and loss of administrative efficiency.

I had plenty of time to think this over, as Vernon and I were to spend some weeks in Palestine before we flew on to Baghdad in the fortnightly air-mail service which had just been instituted by the Royal Air Force. When the time came for us to go across the Jordan to Amman we were offered an evening flight in two two-seater air-craft, which were sent up from Ramleh to pick us up on the Jerusalem aerodrome. For some reason one of these crashed on landing, leaving Vernon and myself to decide which of us should go on and which should remain in Palestine for another fortnight, as it was too late for a third aeroplane to be sent up from Ramleh. Vernon had already been unlucky on the way up from Egypt, having had a forced landing on the beach near Gaza ; but he gallantly volunteered to climb into the surviving machine, as I had not finished my work in Palestine and he had financial business in Baghdad which would probably take him longer than my treaty work would. To my horror his aeroplane also crashed a few seconds after taking off, and he was pulled out unconscious with severe concussion, which put him out of action for over six months.

I was badly shaken by these two accidents, and when the fortnight was up I refused an air passage to Amman and went across by car. Next morning in the grey dawn I watched the air-mail arrive from Cairo, two D.H. 10's and three D.H. 9's, all of which made perfect landings. I was just thinking that it

was lucky that aeroplanes did occasionally land safely when I overheard the Commanding Officer mutter to himself, "Damned shame! All of them grossly overloaded as usual!" "I beg your pardon," I said, "but can you tell me if that one is overloaded, as I believe I am to go in it, and they have not put my kit on board yet?" He looked at me with some surprise and said, "It is wonderful what you can stagger along with, you know, if the engine is pulling nicely." "I am sorry," I replied, "I don't want to seem persistent, but I have just seen two bad crashes in Jerusalem, both of which I am told were due to overloading. Can you tell me who is responsible for seeing that my kit is not too heavy? Are you, or is the pilot, or am I?" "The responsibility is usually fixed at the inquest," he replied coldly, leaving me without any adequate answer.

I climbed into my D.H. 9 with considerable trepidation, which was not lessened when the leading D.H. 10 ran over the edge of the aerodrome and disappeared into the ravine below. Suddenly remembering as we began to take off that I had not been in a D.H. 9 before, I tapped my pilot on the shoulder and asked if there was anything I ought not to touch. "Only the rudder-control," he said. "Don't touch that, whatever you do." "What is the rudder-control? Where is the rudder-control?" I shouted. "I will move it a bit," he replied, but found that he could not, so firmly was my foot wedged in it. I hastily tucked my feet well under me, and making a soft bundle of coats on my knee sat huddled in extreme terror while we took off, but the interest of looking down upon the desert soon conquered my fear. The Royal Air Force had

ploughed a furrow all the way across the desert to Ramadi on the Euphrates, and along this we flew like a hen with her beak on a chalk-line. As we passed over the Hejaz railway and made for the open desert, my mind went back to the exciting days of the Deraa raid three years before, and I lived again through those exciting three weeks when the flying column had found its way from Akaba to join in General Allenby's great advance. When we reached the reedy pools of Azraq and the ruined castle overlooking them, my thoughts turned naturally to the Arab leader with whose gallant troops I had served during the War, and whom I should find seated on the throne of the Caliphs when the aeroplane next came to rest. Midway across the desert we met another machine which I knew was bringing Philby from Baghdad on his way to see Mr. Churchill in London before taking up the appointment of chief British representative in Trans-Jordan in succession to Lawrence, whom I had just left behind on the Amman aerodrome. It was astonishing to think that only eight years after my visit to Yahya Beg, when I had reluctantly abandoned my plan of riding across this same stretch of desert, two aeroplanes starting from opposite ends of what would then have been a six weeks' camel-ride should pass within a few yards of each other with the precision of a railway time-table, linking up in a few short hours the experiences of nearly nine years' connection with the Arab people. It was, I hoped, an augury that the co-ordination of policy for which I had so long been working was at last to be an accomplished fact.

We reached Baghdad in five and a half hours, helped by a strong following wind, and I slept that

night in a house only a few doors away from my old headquarters in the Local Resources mess. I found that during the four years which had passed since I had left the country immense progress had been made in every branch of the administration. The energy of Colonel Wilson and the enthusiasm of his officers had resulted in the short space of three years in the creation of a working machine which had survived both the disturbances of 1920 and the subsequent change in the political régime. This legacy from the days of direct British administration was a priceless asset to the newly formed Iraqi Government. All that was now required was to prepare for its progressive transfer to Iraqi hands.

When Sir Percy Cox first assumed the office of High Commissioner in October 1920 and called into being the provisional Council of State, the mandatory obligations of His Majesty's Government had not been officially defined, and no decision had been taken as to the way in which they were to be carried out. In these circumstances the High Commissioner had remained the executive head of the Government, reserving to himself the control of foreign relations and all military affairs, and closely supervising the administration of the remaining Departments by the Iraqi ministers. The coronation of King Feisal in August 1921, and the appointment by him of the first Council of Ministers in the following month, had introduced a second authority in Iraq whose relations with the High Commissioner must now be defined. It was clear that the immediate transfer of full responsibility to this newly established Iraqi authority would be undesirable, even if it were practically possible. All the official correspondence was conducted in

English, which hardly any of the Iraqi ministers understood ; the vast majority of the responsible officials in the administration were either British or British Indian ; many parts of the structure were alien to Arab, or rather to Turkish traditions ; and the ministers themselves were inexperienced and could not be expected to take immediate charge of their Departments. On the other hand, they were theoretically responsible to their King for the government of the country, and when the Organic Law had been framed and enacted they would be actually responsible to the Iraqi Parliament. Some method must be devised by which they could progressively assume this responsibility without the risk of the machine breaking down. In the same way, the King himself and his future Parliament would have some day to be completely independent of foreign control if the provisional independence recognised in the Covenant of the League of Nations was really to lead to their standing alone. Here again there must be no sudden dislocation, but in neither case must the transfer be delayed too long, for fear that it might never take place at all.

I discussed the whole question with Sir Percy Cox, in the light of what I had been told at Alexandria, and he came to the conclusion that the only way to ensure that responsibility would ultimately be transferred to the Iraqi Government was formally to divest the High Commissioner of all executive authority from the very beginning, and to provide that he should stand to the King of Iraq and his Government in the official relation of an adviser rather than of a controlling authority. Sir Percy had, in fact, been standing to King Feisal in precisely this relation during the three months that had

passed since the coronation, and he was personally prepared to stake upon its effective continuance the due fulfilment by His Majesty's Government of their general mandatory obligations. The principle was accepted by His Majesty's Government and ultimately recognised in the treaty by an article which provided that the King of Iraq agreed to be guided by the advice of the High Commissioner on all important matters affecting the international and financial obligations and interests of His Britannic Majesty. I doubt whether any great Power has ever before placed her international credit so unreservedly in allied hands, but events have shown that the confidence reposed in King Feisal by His Majesty's Government was not misplaced.

There remained the question of the British officials. Were they to be servants of His Majesty's Government, or of the Iraqi Government, or of both Governments? I felt very strongly that the natural corollary of the decision about the High Commissioner was that a very clear distinction should be drawn between the officers on his staff and those who were actually employed in the Iraqi administration. By chance King Feisal lived on the left bank of the Tigris and Sir Percy Cox on the right, and it became the practice, during the negotiations, to refer to the relations between the two banks of the river. My theory was that the officials on the right bank, under the High Commissioner, should be responsible to His Majesty's Government and those on the left to King Feisal and the Iraqi Government. Only in this way could we avoid from the outset the danger that British advice and assistance might never cease to be British control. In order that the



British officials on the left bank might know exactly where they stood, a letter of appointment was drafted which was afterwards issued by the High Commissioner to all those who were retained in the service of the Iraqi Government and to all who entered it during the next ten years. This letter contained the following passages :

“The members of the High Commissioner’s staff will be the servants of His Britannic Majesty, and responsible for placing the High Commissioner in a position to offer his advice on all subjects referred to in the Treaty. You and your colleagues will be responsible to the Iraq Government and not to the High Commissioner, but His Majesty the King of Iraq has agreed that the High Commissioner should at all times be furnished with such information as he may require relating to your official duties in the Iraq Government ; he has also agreed that the High Commissioner should be informed in advance of any step which the Government of Iraq proposes to take which may affect the international and financial obligations and interests of His Britannic Majesty’s Government. This information will be communicated through the Ministry to which you are responsible to the member of the High Commissioner’s staff who is primarily concerned, and the Iraq Government will be informed on each occasion that the information has been supplied.

“The basic principle underlying the relations between the two Governments is co-operation towards a common end, namely, the establishment of an independent Government of Iraq, friendly to and bound by gratitude and obligation to His Britannic Majesty’s Government. There is no question of His Britannic Majesty’s Government pursuing a policy with any other object in view and, provided that the Treaty and its subsidiary agreements are

duly observed, the High Commissioner has been instructed that His Britannic Majesty's Government do not propose to criticise in detail or to influence in any way the detailed financial or administrative arrangements of the Iraq Government.

"The four principles upon which the co-operation of His Britannic Majesty's Government with the Government of Iraq must necessarily be conditional are :

- "(1) that the interests of foreigners are adequately protected ;
- (2) that the financial interests of His Britannic Majesty's Government are safeguarded ;
- (3) that the best possible use is made of the resources of the country ; and
- (4) that the administration should conform to the traditions and principles of progressive and enlightened government.

"His Britannic Majesty's Government have left the fulfilment of the third and fourth of these principles to the Iraq Administration, since His Majesty King Feisal has agreed to employ a number of British officials which will, in the opinion of His Britannic Majesty's Government, ensure that the administration is not conducted in such a way as to prejudice their observance. The Secretary of State desires me to point out to you that, although you and your colleagues will not be officially responsible to His Britannic Majesty's Government, your appointment has only been approved in the full confidence that you will use your influence to secure the attainment of these objects. The Secretary of State feels that he may rely upon you to do your utmost to uphold British prestige and traditions, and that no occasion will arise which will lead to the High Commissioner seeking his authority to bring to the notice of His Majesty the King of Iraq any action

on your part which he may regard as detrimental thereto.

“The terms of service upon which you are engaged have been set forth in a contract which has been given to you by His Majesty the King of Iraq.”

I have quoted these passages because they seem to me to define as concisely as possible the system upon which our work as mandatory Power has been conducted in Iraq for the past ten years. This system represents a novel experiment in the relation between His Majesty's Government and an Eastern people, an experiment deliberately conducted in fulfilment of our war-time promise to recognise and support the independence of the Arabs. It also represents to me the final outcome of my own endeavours to reconcile two opposing schools of thought.

At the end of two busy months I went back to London to report to Mr. Churchill and take up my ordinary work in the Middle East Department. During my stay in Iraq I had visited all the important centres : Mosul, where I had first arrived on my raft in 1913 ; Arbil and Kirkuk, which I had not seen before ; Hillah, where I had bought barley in 1917, and where I found my old friends Dickson of Suq ash Sheyukh and Ali Jaudat Beg of the Deraa flying column working together under the new dispensation ; Nasiriyah, where I had formed the first councils in 1916 ; Basrah, still protected by the Shaiba Bund from the Euphrates floods ; Amara and Kut al Amara, where I found old friends of the early days ; and lastly Baghdad itself, where King Feisal and Sir Percy Cox, ably seconded by the officers of Colonel Wilson's civil administration and by Cornwallis, Joyce, and all my Iraq companions in

arms of Arabia Petræa, were setting out upon their new adventure. Difficulties there would certainly be ; but as the aeroplane bore me on its strong wings over the desert I felt that a new era had dawned, and that with the goodwill of His Majesty's Government and the powerful help of the Royal Air Force the Arabs of Iraq would undoubtedly win their independence at the last.

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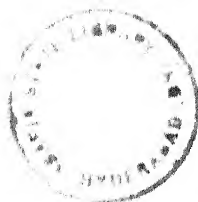
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